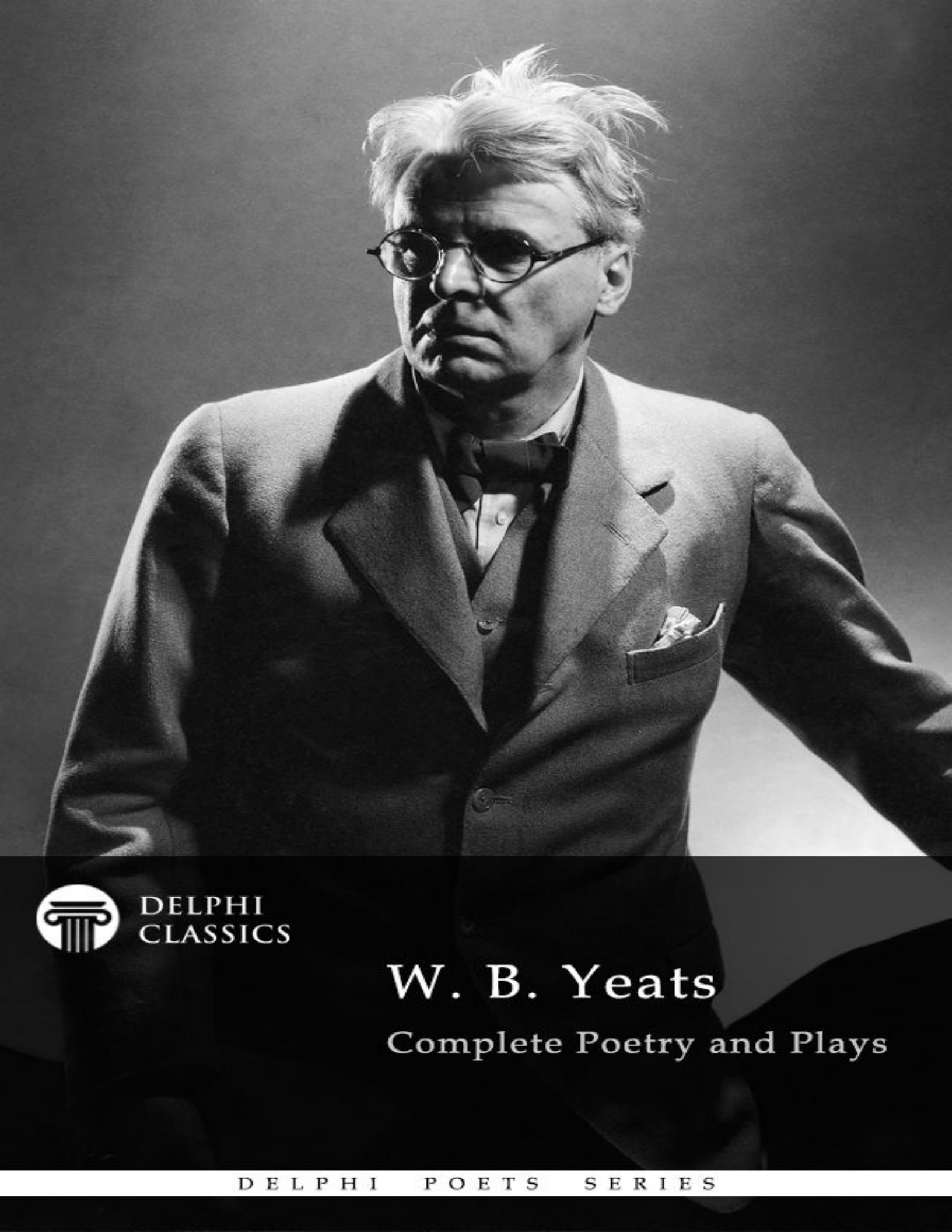

DELPHI CLASSICS

W. B. Yeats

Complete Poetry and Plays

DELPHI POETS SERIES

DELPHI POETS SERIES

W. B. Yeats

(1865–1939)

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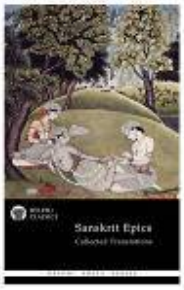

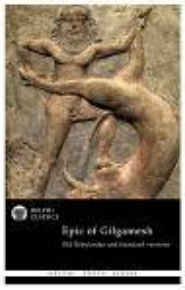

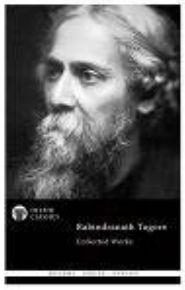

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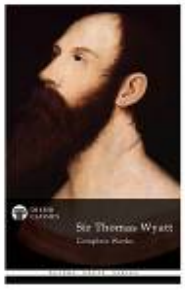

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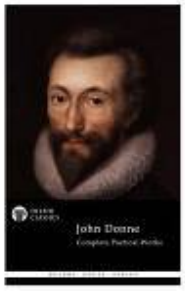

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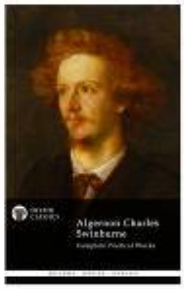

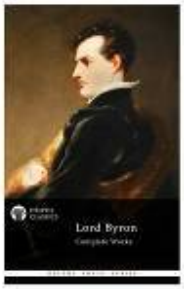

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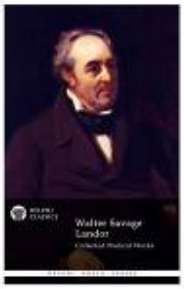

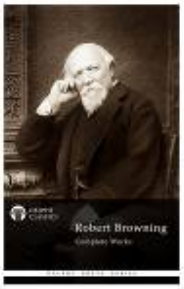

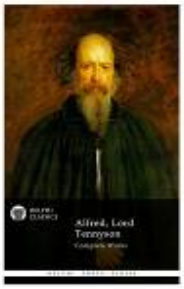

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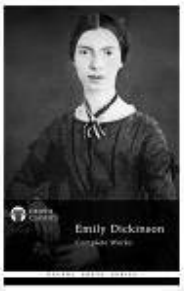
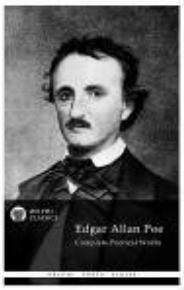
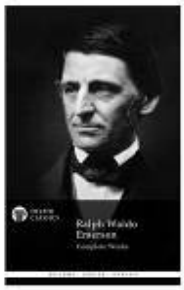
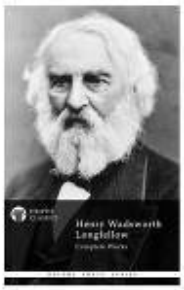
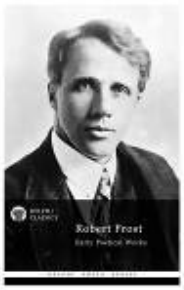


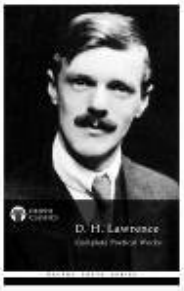


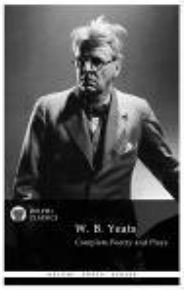




Moderns







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W. B. Yeats

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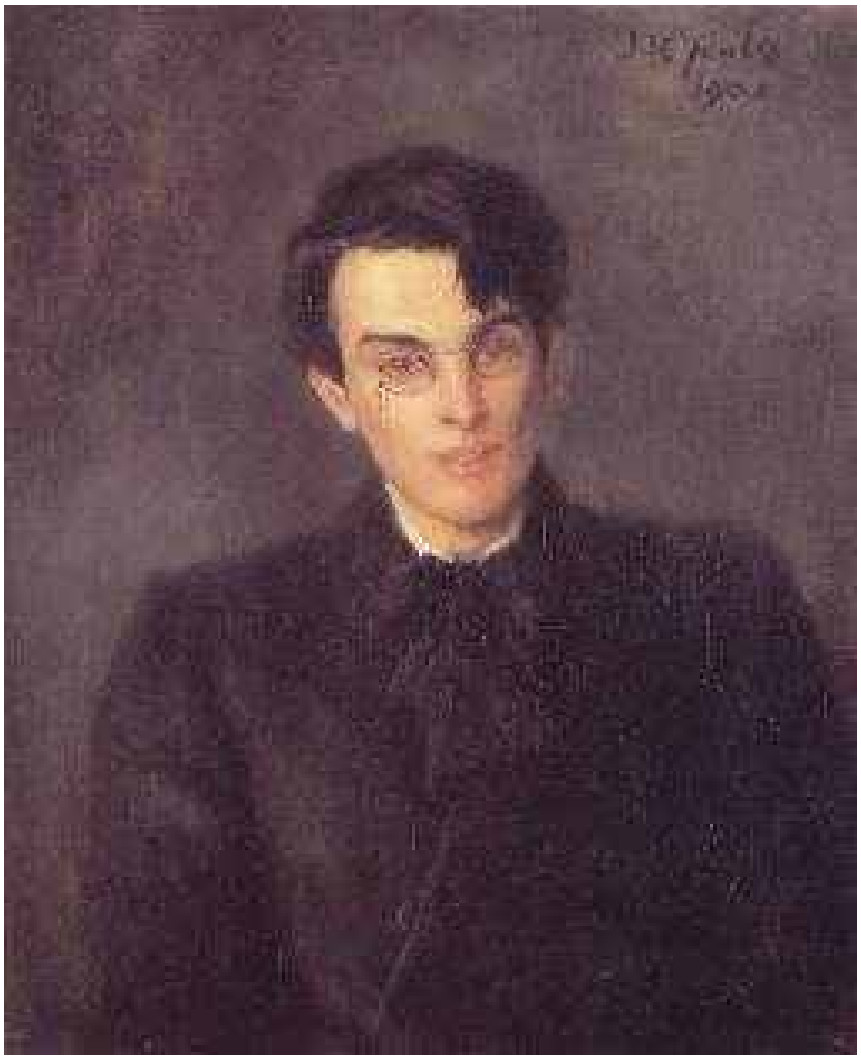
NOTE

When reading poetry on an eReader, it is advisable to use a small font size, which will allow the lines of poetry to display correctly.

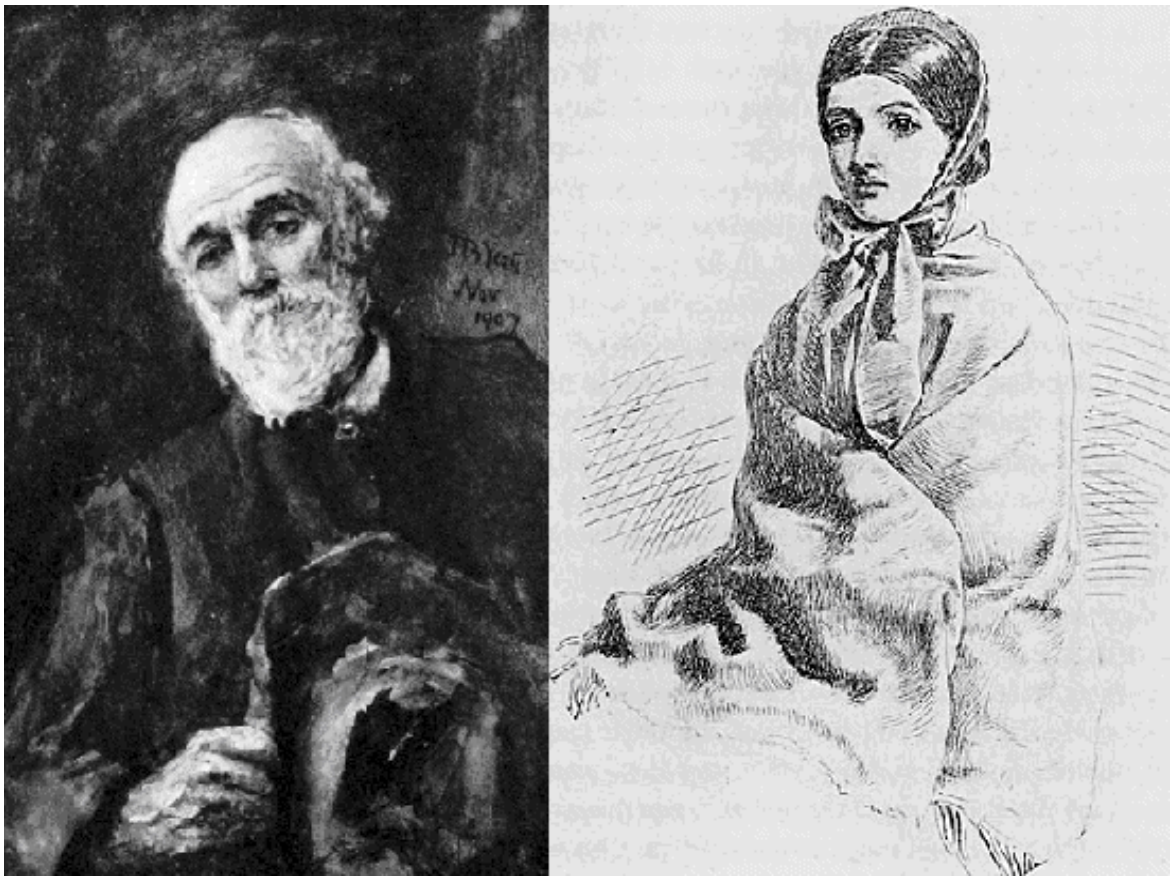
The Poetry Collections

Sandymount, County Dublin — Yeats' birthplace, 1911

Yeats' birthplace today



Yeats' father was an artist and in 1900 he painted this portrait of his son.



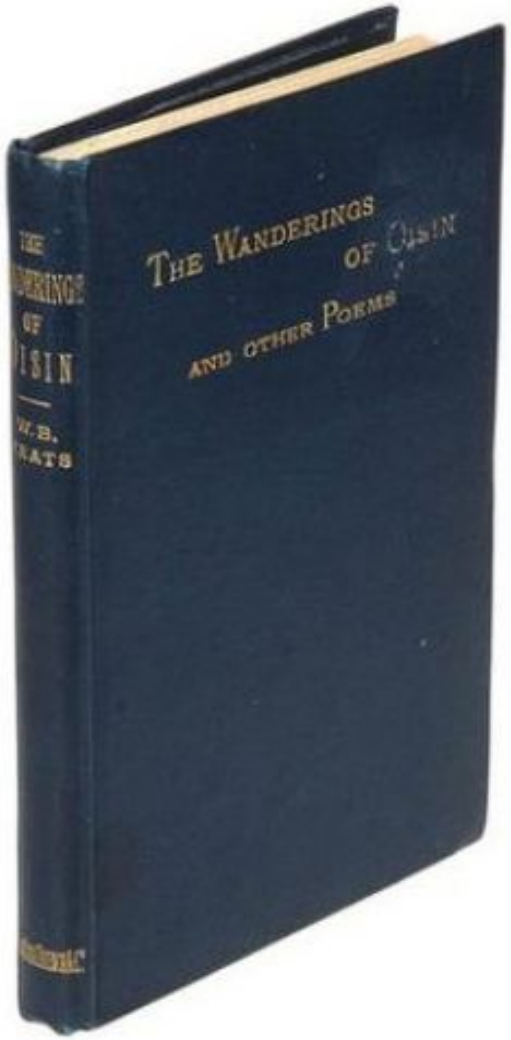
Yeats' parents

The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems

Yeats' first poetry collection was published in 1889, with poems dating as far back as the mid-1880s. The title piece, which is Yeats' longest narrative poem, concerns characters from the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology, revealing how Yeats was influenced by Sir Samuel Ferguson and the Pre-Raphaelite poets of the time. The poem took two years to complete and was one of the few works from this period that the poet did not disown in his maturity. Oisin represents one of Yeats' most important themes: the preference of a life of contemplation over a life of action. Following the publication of *The Wanderings Of Oisin*, Yeats never again attempted a long poem.

In the narrative, the fairy princess Niamh falls in love with Oisin's poetry and begs him to join her in the immortal islands. For a hundred years he lives as one of the Sidhe, while hunting, dancing and feasting. At the end of this time he finds a spear washed up on the shore, which evokes sad feelings as he remembers his previous life, heralding the beginning of his wanderings.

The poetry collection also contains short poems, which are meditations on the themes of love and mystical subjects, and they were later collected under the title *Crossways.*



The first edition

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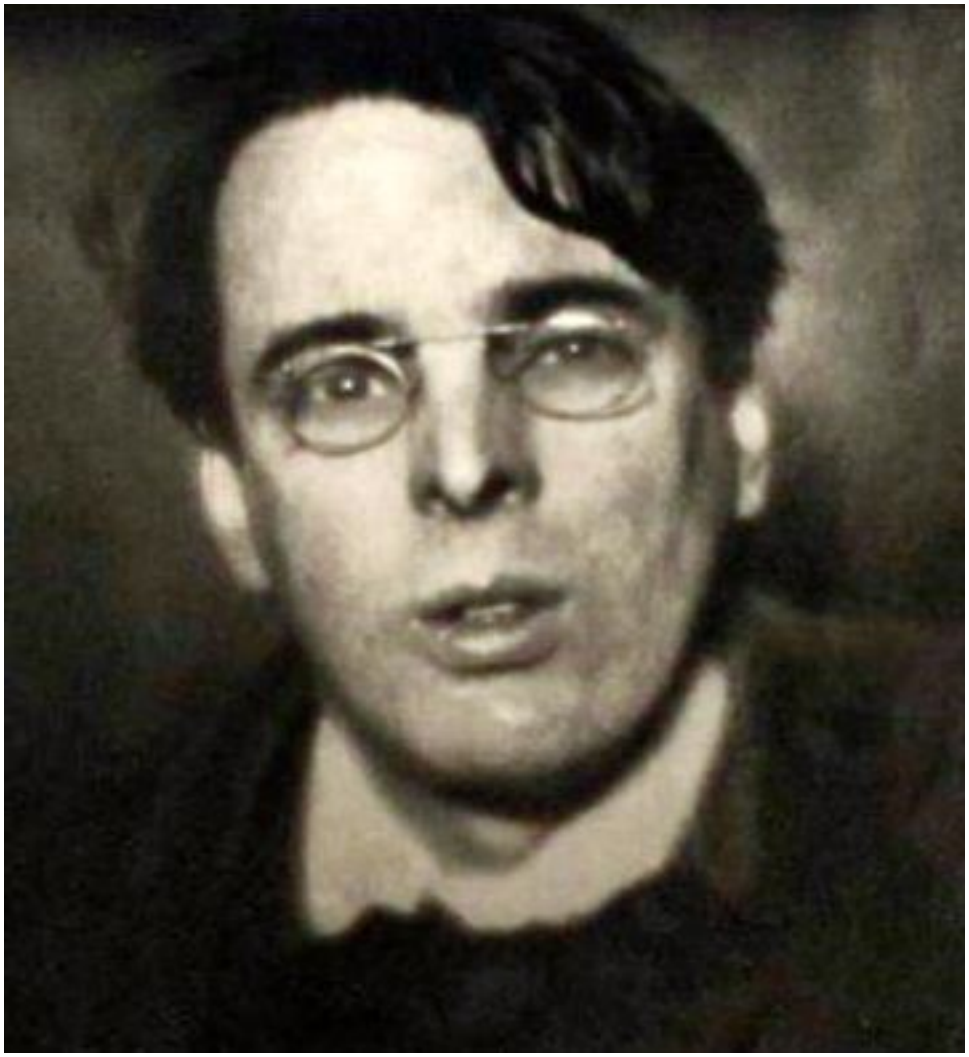


Yeats, in the year when his first poetry collection was published

THE WANDERINGS OF USHEEN

"*Give me the world if Thou wilt, but grant me an asylum for my affections.*"

Tulka.

To
EDWIN J. ELLIS

BOOK I

S. PATRIC

You who are bent, and bald, and blind,
With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,
Have known three centuries, poets sing,
Of dalliance with a demon thing.

USHEEN

Sad to remember, sick with years,
The swift innumerable spears,
The horsemen with their floating hair,
And bowls of barley, honey, and wine,
And feet of maidens dancing in tune,
And the white body that lay by mine;
But the tale, though words be lighter than air,
Must live to be old like the wandering moon.

Caolte, and Conan, and Finn were there,
When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,
With Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,
And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill
Where passionate Maive is stony still;
And found on the dove-gray edge of the sea
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
And like a sunset were her lips,

A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
Of many a figured embroidery;
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
That wavered like the summer streams,
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

S. PATRIC

You are still wrecked among heathen dreams.

USHEEN

“Why do you wind no horn?” she said.
“And every hero droop his head?
“The hornless deer is not more sad
“That many a peaceful moment had,
“More sleek than any granary mouse,
“In his own leafy forest house
“Among the waving fields of fern:
“The hunting of heroes should be glad.”

“O pleasant woman,” answered Finn,
“We think on Oscar’s pencilled urn,
“And on the heroes lying slain,
On Gavra’s raven-covered plain;
“But where are your noble kith and kin,
“And from what country do you ride?”

“My father and my mother are
“Aengus and Adene, my own name
“Niam, and my country far
“Beyond the tumbling of this tide.”

“What dream came with you that you came
“Through bitter tide on foam wet feet?
“Did your companion wander away
“From where the birds of Aengus wing?”

She said, with laughter tender and sweet:
“I have not yet, war-weary king,
“Been spoken of with any one;
“Yet now I choose, for these four feet
“Ran through the foam and ran to this
“That I might have your son to kiss.”

“Were there no better than my son
“That you through all that foam should run?”

“I loved no man, though kings besought
“Love, till the Danaan poets brought
“Rhyme, that rhymed to Usheen’s name,
“And now I am dizzy with the thought
“Of all that wisdom and the fame
“Of battles broken by his hands,
“Of stories builded by his words
“That are like coloured Asian birds
“At evening in their rainless lands.”

O Patric, by your brazen bell,
There was no limb of mine but fell
Into a desperate gulph of love!
“You only will I wed,” I cried,
“And I will make a thousand songs,
“And set your name all names above.
“And captives bound with leathern thongs
“Shall kneel and praise you, one by one,
“At evening in my western dun.”

“O Usheen, mount by me and ride
“To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,
“Where men have heaped no burial mounds,
“And the days pass by like a wayward tune,
“Where broken faith has never been known,
“And the blushes of first love never have flown;
“And there I will give you a hundred hounds;
“No mightier creatures bay at the moon;
“And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,
“And a hundred calves and a hundred sheep
“Whose long wool whiter than sea froth flows,
“And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,
“And oil and wine and honey and milk,
“And always never-anxious sleep;
“While a hundred youths, mighty of limb,
“But knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife,
“And a hundred maidens, merry as birds,
“Who when they dance to a fitful measure
“Have a speed like the speed of the salmon herds,

“Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,
“And you shall know the Danaan leisure:
“And Niam be with you for a wife.”
Then she sighed gently, “It grows late,
“Music and love and sleep await,
“Where I would be when the white moon climbs
“The red sun falls, and the world grows dim.”

And then I mounted and she bound me
With her triumphing arms around me,
And whispering to herself enwound me;
But when the horse had felt my weight,
He shook himself and neighed three times:
Caolte, Conan, and Finn came near,
And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,
And bid me stay, with many a tear;
But we rode out from the human lands.

In what far kingdom do you go,
Ah, Fenians, with the shield and bow?
Or are you phantoms white as snow,
Whose lips had life’s most prosperous glow?
O you, with whom in sloping valleys,
Or down the dewy forest alleys,
I chased at morn the flying deer,
With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,
And heard the foemen’s bucklers rattle,
And broke the heaving ranks of battle!
And Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,

Where are you with your long rough hair?
You go not where the red deer feeds,
Nor tear the foemen from their steeds.

S. PATRIC

Boast not, nor mourn with drooping head
Companions long accurst and dead,
And hounds for centuries dust and air.

USHEEN

We galloped over the glossy sea:
I know not if days passed or hours,
And Niam sang continually
Danaan songs, and their dewy showers
Of pensive laughter, unhuman sound,
Lulled weariness, and softly round
My human sorrow her white arms wound.

We galloped; now a hornless deer
Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound
All pearly white, save one red ear;
And now a maiden rode like the wind
With an apple of gold in her tossing hand;
And a beautiful young man followed behind
With quenchless gaze and fluttering hair.

“Were these two born in the Danaan land,
“Or have they breathed the mortal air?”

“Vex them no longer,” Niam said,
And sighing bowed her gentle head,
And sighing laid the pearly tip
Of one long finger on my lip.

But now the moon like a white rose shone
In the pale west, and the sun’s rim sank,
And clouds arrayed their rank on rank
About his fading crimson ball:
The floor of Emen’s hosting hall
Was not more level than the sea,
As full of loving phantasy,
And with low murmurs we rode on,
Where many a trumpet-twisted shell
That in immortal silence sleeps
Dreaming of her own melting hues,
Her golds, her ambers, and her blues,
Pierced with soft light the shallowing deeps.

But now a wandering land breeze came
And a far sound of feathery quires;
It seemed to blow from the dying flame,
They seemed to sing in the smouldering fires.
The horse towards the music raced,
Neighing along the lifeless waste;
Like sooty fingers, many a tree
Rose ever out of the warm sea;
And they were trembling ceaselessly,
As though they all were beating time,

Upon the centre of the sun,
To that low laughing woodland rhyme.
And, now our wandering hours were done,
We cantered to the shore, and knew
The reason of the trembling trees:
Round every branch the song-birds flew,
Or clung thereon like swarming bees;
While round the shore a million stood
Like drops of frozen rainbow light,
And pondered in a soft vain mood
Upon their shadows in the tide,
And told the purple deeps their pride,
And murmured snatches of delight;
And on the shores were many boats
With bending sterns and bending bows.

And carven figures on their prows
Of bitterns, and fish-eating stoats,
And swans with their exultant throats:
And where the wood and waters meet
We tied the horse in a leafy clump,
And Niam blew three merry notes
Out of a little silver trump;
And then an answering whispering flew
Over the bare and woody land,
A whisper of impetuous feet,
And ever nearer, nearer grew;
And from the woods rushed out a band
Of men and maidens, hand in hand,

And singing, singing altogether;
Their brows were white as fragrant milk,
Their cloaks made out of yellow silk,
And trimmed with many a crimson feather:
And when they saw the cloak I wore
Was dim with mire of a mortal shore,
They fingered it and gazed on me
And laughed like murmurs of the sea;
But Niam with a swift distress
Bid them away and hold their peace;
And when they heard her voice they ran
And knelt them, every maid and man
And kissed, as they would never cease,
Her pearl-pale hand and the hem of her dress.
She bade them bring us to the hall
Where Aengus dreams, from sun to sun,
A Druid dream of the end of days
When the stars are to wane and the world be done.

They led us by long and shadowy ways
Where drops of dew in myriads fall,
And tangled creepers every hour
Blossom in some new crimson flower,
And once a sudden laughter sprang
From all their lips, and once they sang
Together, while the dark woods rang,
And made in all their distant parts,
With boom of bees in honey marts,
A rumour of delighted hearts.

And once a maiden by my side
Gave me a harp, and bid me sing,
And touch the laughing silver string;
But when I sang of human joy
A sorrow wrapped each merry face,
And, Patric! by your beard, they wept,
Until one came, a tearful boy;
“A sadder creature never stept
“Than this strange human bard,” he cried;
And caught the silver harp away,
And, weeping over the white strings, hurled
It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place
That kept dim waters from the sky;
And each one said, with a long, long sigh,
“O saddest harp in all the world,
“Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!”

And now still sad we came to where
A beautiful young man dreamed within
A house of wattles, clay, and skin;
One hand upheld his beardless chin,
And one a sceptre flashing out
Wild flames of red and gold and blue,
Like to a merry wandering rout
Of dancers leaping in the air;
And men and maidens knelt them there
And showed their eyes with teardrops dim,
And with low murmurs prayed to him,

And kissed the sceptre with red lips,
And touched it with their finger-tips.

He held that flashing sceptre up.
“Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,
“And fills with stars night’s purple cup,
“And wakes the sluggard seeds of corn,
“And stirs the young kid’s budding horn.
“And makes the infant ferns unwrap,
“And for the peewit paints his cap,
“And rolls along the unwieldy sun,
“And makes the little planets run:
“And if joy were not on the earth,
“There were an end of change and birth,
“And earth and heaven and hell would die,
“And in some gloomy barrow lie
“Folded like a frozen fly;
“Then mock at Death and Time with glances
“And wavering arms and wandering dances.

“Men’s hearts of old were drops of flame
“That from the saffron morning came,
“Or drops of silver joy that fell
“Out of the moon’s pale twisted shell;
“But now hearts cry that hearts are slaves,
“And toss and turn in narrow caves;
“But here there is nor law nor rule,
“Nor have hands held a weary tool;
“And here there is nor Change nor Death,

“But only kind and merry breath,
“For joy is God and God is joy.”
With one long glance on maid and boy
And the pale blossom of the moon,
He fell into a Druid swoon.

And in a wild and sudden dance
We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance
And swept out of the wattled hall
And came to where the dewdrops fall
Among the foamdrops of the sea,
And there we hushed the revelry;
And, gathering on our brows a frown,
Bent all our swaying bodies down,
And to the waves that glimmer by
That sloping green De Danaan sod
Sang “God is joy and joy is God.
“And things that have grown sad are wicked,
“And things that fear the dawn of the morrow
“Or the gray wandering osprey Sorrow.”

We danced to where in the winding thicket
The damask roses, bloom on bloom,
Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom,
And bending over them softly said,
Bending over them in the dance,
With a swift and friendly glance
From dewy eyes: “Upon the dead
“Fall the leaves of other roses,

“On the dead dim earth encloses:
“But never, never on our graves,
“Heaped beside the glimmering waves,
“Shall fall the leaves of damask roses.
“For neither Death nor Change comes near us,
“And all listless hours fear us,
“And we fear no dawning morrow,
“Nor the gray wandering osprey Sorrow.”

The dance wound through the windless woods;
The ever-summered solitudes;
Until the tossing arms grew still
Upon the woody central hill;
And, gathered in a panting band,
We flung on high each waving hand,
And sang unto the starry broods:
In our raised eyes there flashed a glow
Of milky brightness to and fro
As thus our song arose: “You stars,
“Across your wandering ruby cars
“Shake the loose reins: you slaves of God
“He rules you with an iron rod,
“He holds you with an iron bond,
“Each one woven to the other,
“Each one woven to his brother
“Like bubbles in a frozen pond;
“But we in a lonely land abide
“Unchainable as the dim tide,
“With hearts that know nor law nor rule,

“And hands that hold no wearisome tool
“Folded in love that fears no morrow,
“Nor the gray wandering osprey Sorrow.”

O Patric! for a hundred years
I chased upon that woody shore
The deer, the badger, and the boar.
O Patric! for a hundred years
At evening on the glimmering sands,
Beside the piled-up hunting spears,
These now outworn and withered hands
Wrestled among the island bands.
O Patric! for a hundred years
We went a-fishing in long boats
With bending sterns and bending bows,
And carven figures on their prows
Of bitterns and fish-eating stoats.
O Patric! for a hundred years
The gentle Niam was my wife;
But now two things devour my life;
The things that most of all I hate;
Fasting and prayers.

S. PATRIC

Tell on.

USHEEN

Yes, yes,
For these were ancient Usheen's fate
Loosed long ago from heaven's gate,
For his last days to lie in wait.

When one day by the tide I stood,
I found in that forgetfulness
Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
From some dead warrior's broken lance:
I turned it in my hands; the stains
Of war were on it, and I wept,
Remembering how the Fenians stept
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
Equal to good or grievous chance:
Thereon young Niam softly came
And caught my hands, but spake no word
Save only many times my name,
In murmurs, like a frighted bird.
We passed by woods, and lawns of clover,
And found the horse and bridled him,
For we knew well the old was over.
I heard one say "His eyes grow dim
"With all the ancient sorrow of men";
And wrapped in dreams rode out again
With hoofs of the pale findrinny
Over the glimmering purple sea:
Under the golden evening light.
The immortals moved among the fountains
By rivers and the woods' old night;

Some danced like shadows on the mountains,
Some wandered ever hand in hand,
Or sat in dreams on the pale strand;
Each forehead like an obscure star
Bent down above each hooked knee:
And sang, and with a dreamy gaze
Watched where the sun in a saffron blaze
Was slumbering half in the sea ways;
And, as they sang, the painted birds
Kept time with their bright wings and feet;
Like drops of honey came their words,
But fainter than a young lamb's bleat.

"An old man stirs the fire to a blaze,
"In the house of a child, of a friend, of a brother
"He has over-lingered his welcome; the days,
"Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each other;
"He hears the storm in the chimney above,
"And bends to the fire and shakes with the cold,
"While his heart still dreams of battle and love,
"And the cry of the hounds on the hills of old.

"But we are apart in the grassy places,
"Where care cannot trouble the least of our days,
"Or the softness of youth be gone from our faces,
"Or love's first tenderness die in our gaze.
"The hare grows old as she plays in the sun
"And gazes around her with eyes of brightness;
"Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done

“She limps along in an aged whiteness;
“A storm of birds in the Asian trees
“Like tulips in the air a-winging,
“And the gentle waves of the summer seas,
“That raise their heads and wander singing.
“Must murmur at last ‘Unjust, unjust’;
“And ‘My speed is a weariness,’ falters the mouse
“And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust,
“And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house.

“But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day
“When God shall come from the sea with a sigh
“And bid the stars drop down from the sky,
“And the moon like a pale rose wither away.”

BOOK II

Now, man of croziers, shadows called our names
And then away, away, like whirling flames;
And now fled by, mist-covered, without sound,
The youth and lady and the deer and hound;
“Gaze no more on the phantoms,” Niam said,
And kissed my eyes, and, swaying her bright head
And her bright body, sang of faery and man
Before God was or my old line began;
Wars shadowy, vast, exultant; faeries of old
Who wedded men with rings of Druid gold;
And how those lovers never turn their eyes
Upon the life that fades and flickers and dies,

But love and kiss on dim shores far away
Rolled round with music of the sighing spray:
But sang no more, as when, like a brown bee
That has drunk full, she crossed the misty sea
With me in her white arms a hundred years
Before this day; for now the fall of tears
Troubled her song.

I do not know if days
Or hours passed by, yet hold the morning rays
Shone many times among the glimmering flowers
Woven into her hair, before dark towers
Rose in the darkness, and the white surf gleamed
About them; and the horse of faery screamed
And shivered, knowing the Isle of many Fears,
Nor ceased until white Niam stroked his ears
And named him by sweet names.

A foaming tide
Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and wide,
Burst from a great door marred by many a blow
From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago
When gods and giants warred. We rode between
The seaweed-covered pillars, and the green
And surging phosphorus alone gave light
On our dark pathway, till a countless flight
Of moonlit steps glimmered; and left and right
Dark statues glimmered over the pale tide
Upon dark thrones. Between the lids of one

The imaged meteors had flashed and run
And had disported in the stilly jet,
And the fixed stars had dawned and shone and set,
Since God made Time and Death and Sleep: the other
Stretched his long arm to where, a misty smother,
The stream churned, churned, and churned — his lips apart,
As though he told his never slumbering heart
Of every foamdrop on its misty way:
Tying the horse to his vast foot that lay
Half in the unvesselled sea, we climbed the stairs
And climbed so long, I thought the last steps were
Hung from the morning star; when these mild words
Fanned the delighted air like wings of birds:
“My brothers spring out of their beds at morn,
“A-murmur like young partridge: with loud horn
“They chase the noontide deer;
“And when the dew-drowned stars hang in the air
“Look to long fishing-lines, or point and pare
“An ash-wood hunting spear.

“O sigh, O fluttering sigh, be kind to me;
“Flutter along the froth lips of the sea,
“And shores, the froth lips wet:
“And stay a little while, and bid them weep:
“Ah, touch their blue-veined eyelids if they sleep,
“And shake their coverlet.

“When you have told how I weep endlessly,
“Flutter along the froth lips of the sea

“And home to me again,
“And in the shadow of my hair lie hid,
“And tell me how you came to one unbid,
“The saddest of all men.”

A maiden with soft eyes like funeral tapers,
And face that seemed wrought out of moonlit vapours,
And a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous
As any ruddy moth, looked down on us;
And she with a wave-rusted chain was tied
To two old eagles, full of ancient pride,
That with dim eyeballs stood on either side.
Few feathers were on their dishevelled wings,
For their dim minds were with the ancient things.

“I bring deliverance,” pearl-pale Niam said.

“Neither the living, nor the unlabouring dead,
“Nor the high gods who never lived, may fight
“My enemy and hope; demons for fright
“Jabber and scream about him in the night;
“For he is strong and crafty as the seas
“That sprang under the Seven Hazel Trees,
“And I must needs endure and hate and weep,
“Until the gods and demons drop asleep,
“Hearing Aed touch the mournful strings of gold.”

“Is he so dreadful?”

“Be not over bold,
“But flee while you may flee from him.”

Then I:
“This demon shall be pierced and drop and die,
“And his loose bulk be thrown in the loud tide.”

“Flee from him,” pearl-pale Niam weeping cried,
“For all men flee the demons”; but moved not
My angry, king remembering soul one jot;
There was no mightier soul of Heber’s line;
Now it is old and mouse-like: for a sign
I burst the chain: still earless, nerveless, blind,
Wrapped in the things of the unhuman mind,
In some dim memory or ancient mood
Still earless, nerveless, blind, the eagles stood.

And then we climbed the stair to a high door;
A hundred horsemen on the basalt floor
Beneath had paced content: we held our way
And stood within: clothed in a misty ray
I saw a foam-white seagull drift and float
Under the roof, and with a straining throat
Shouted, and hailed him: he hung there a star,
For no man’s cry shall ever mount so far;
Not even your God could have thrown down that hall;
Stabling His unloosed lightnings in their stall,
He had sat down and sighed with cumbered heart,
As though His hour were come.

We sought the part
That was most distant from the door; green slime
Made the way slippery, and time on time
Showed prints of sea-born scales, while down through it
The captive's journeys to and fro were writ
Like a small river, and, where feet touched, came
A momentary gleam of phosphorus flame.
Under the deepest shadows of the hall
That maiden found a ring hung on the wall,
And in the ring a torch, and with its flare
Making a world about her in the air,
Passed under a dim doorway, out of sight
And came again, holding a second light
Burning between her fingers, and in mine
Laid it and sighed: I held a sword whose shine
No centuries could dim: and a word ran
Thereon in Ogham letters, "Mananan";
That sea god's name, who in a deep content
Sprang dripping, and, with captive demons sent
Out of the seven-fold seas, built the dark hall
Rooted in foam and clouds, and cried to all
The mightier masters of a mightier race;
And at his cry there came no milk-pale face
Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,
But only exultant faces.

Niam stood
With bowed head, trembling when the white blade shone,
But she whose hours of tenderness were gone

Had neither hope nor fear. I bade them hide
Under the shadows till the tumults died
Of the loud crashing and earth shaking fight,
Lest they should look upon some dreadful sight;
And thrust the torch between the slimy flags.
A dome made out of endless carven jags,
Where shadowy face flowed into shadowy face,
Looked down on me; and in the self-same place
I waited hour by hour, and the high dome,
Windowless, pillarless, multitudinous home
Of faces, waited; and the leisured gaze
Was loaded with the memory of days
Buried and mighty. When through the great door
The dawn came in, and glimmered on the floor
With a pale light, I journeyed round the hall
And found a door deep sunken in the wall,
The least of doors; beyond on a dim plain
A little runnel made a bubbling strain,
And on the runnel's stony and bare edge
A husky demon dry as a withered sedge
Swayed, crooning to himself an unknown tongue:
In a sad revelry he sang and swung
Bacchant and mournful, passing to and fro
His hand along the runnel's side, as though
The flowers still grew there: far on the sea's waste
Shaking and waving, vapour vapour chased,
While high frail cloudlets, fed with a green light,
Like drifts of leaves, immovable and bright,

Hung in the passionate dawn. He slowly turned:
A demon's leisure: eyes, first white, now burned
Like wings of kingfishers; and he arose
Barking. We trampled up and down with blows
Of sword and brazen battle-axe, while day
Gave to high noon and noon to night gave way;
And when at withering of the sun he knew
The Druid sword of Mananan, he grew
To many shapes; I lunged at the smooth throat
Of a great eel; it changed, and I but smote
A fir-tree roaring in its leafless top;
I held a dripping corpse, with livid chop
And sunken shape, against my face and breast,
When I tore down the tree; but when the west
Surged up in plumy fire, I lunged and drave
Through heart and spine, and cast him in the wave,
Lest Niam shudder.

Full of hope and dread
Those two came carrying wine and meat and bread,
And healed my wounds with unguents out of flowers
That feed white moths by some De Danaan shrine;
Then in that hall, lit by the dim sea shine,
We lay on skins of otters, and drank wine,
Brewed by the sea-gods, from huge cups that lay
Upon the lips of sea-gods in their day;
And then on heaped-up skins of otters slept.
But when the sun once more in saffron stept,
Rolling his flagrant wheel out of the deep,

We sang the loves and angers without sleep,
And all the exultant labours of the strong:

But now the lying clerics murder song
With barren words and flatteries of the weak.
In what land do the powerless turn the beak
Of ravening Sorrow, or the hand of Wrath?
For all your croziers, they have left the path
And wander in the storms and clinging snows,
Hopeless for ever: ancient Usheen knows,
For he is weak and poor and blind, and lies
On the anvil of the world.

S. PATRIC

Be still: the skies
Are choked with thunder, lightning, and fierce wind,
For God has heard, and speaks His angry mind;
Go cast your body on the stones and pray,
For He has wrought midnight and dawn and day.

USHEEN

Saint, do you weep? I hear amid the thunder
The Fenian horses; armour torn asunder;
Laughter and cries; the armies clash and shock;
All is done now; I see the ravens flock;
Ah, cease, you mournful, laughing Fenian horn!

We feasted for three days. On the fourth morn
I found, dropping sea foam on the wide stair,
And hung with slime, and whispering in his hair,
That demon dull and unsubduable;
And once more to a day-long battle fell,
And at the sundown threw him in the surge,
To lie until the fourth morn saw emerge
His new healed shape: and for a hundred years
So warred, so feasted, with nor dreams nor fears,
Nor languor nor fatigue: and endless feast,
An endless war.

The hundred years had ceased;
I stood upon the stair: the surges bore
A beech bough to me, and my heart grew sore,
Remembering how I had stood by white-haired Finn
Under a beech at Emen and heard the thin
Outcry of bats.

And then young Niam came
Holding that horse, and sadly called my name;
I mounted, and we passed over the lone
And drifting grayness, while this monotone,
Surly and distant, mixed inseparably
Into the clangour of the wind and sea.

“I hear my soul drop down into decay,
“And Mananan’s dark tower, stone by stone,
“Gather sea slime and fall the seaward way,

“And the moon goad the waters night and day,
“That all be overthrown.

“But till the moon has taken all, I wage
“War on the mightiest men under the skies,
“And they have fallen or fled, age after age:
“Light is man’s love, and lighter is man’s rage;
“His purpose drifts and dies.”

And then lost Niam murmured, “Love, we go
“To the Island of Forgetfulness, for lo!
“The Islands of Dancing and of Victories
“Are empty of all power.”

“And which of these
“Is the Island of Content?”

“None know,” she said;
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.

BOOK III

Fled foam underneath us, and around us, a wandering and milky smoke,
High as the saddle girth, covering away from our glances the tide;
And those that fled, and that followed, from the foam-pale distance broke;
The immortal desire of immortals we saw in their faces, and sighed.

I mused on the chase with the Fenians, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair,
And never a song sang Niam, and over my finger-tips
Came now the sliding of tears and sweeping of mist-cold hair,
And now the warmth of sighs, and after the quiver of lips.

Were we days long or hours long in riding, when rolled in a grisly peace,
An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel and oak?
And we stood on a sea's edge we saw not; for whiter than new-washed fleece
Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering and milky smoke.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's edge; the sea's edge barren and gray,
Gray sand on the green of the grasses and over the dripping trees,
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would hasten away
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the moan of the seas.

But the trees grew taller and closer, immense in their wrinkling bark;
Dropping; a murmurous dropping; old silence and that one sound;
For no live creatures lived there, no weasels moved in the dark:
Long sighs arose in our spirits, beneath us bubbled the ground.

And the ears of the horse went sinking away in the hollow night,
For, as drift from a sailor slow drowning the gleams of the world and the

sun,
Ceased on our hands and our faces, on hazel and oak leaf, the light,
And the stars were blotted above us, and the whole of the world was one.

Till the horse gave a whinny; for, cumbrous with stems of the hazel and oak,
A valley flowed down from his hoofs, and there in the long grass lay,
Under the starlight and shadow, a monstrous slumbering folk,
Their naked and gleaming bodies poured out and heaped in the way.

And by them were arrow and war-axe, arrow and shield and blade;
And dew-blanched horns, in whose hollow a child of three years old
Could sleep on a couch of rushes, and all inwrought and inlaid,
And more comely than man can make them with bronze and silver and gold.

And each of the huge white creatures was huger than fourscore men;
The tops of their ears were feathered, their hands were the claws of birds,
And, shaking the plumes of the grasses and the leaves of the mural glen,
The breathing came from those bodies, long-warless, grown whiter than curds.

The wood was so spacious above them, that He who had stars for His flocks
Could fondle the leaves with His fingers, nor go from His dew-cumbered skies;
So long were they sleeping, the owls had builded their nests in their locks,
Filling the fibrous dimness with long generations of eyes.

And over the limbs and the valley the slow owls wandered and came,
Now in a place of star-fire, and now in a shadow place wide;

And the chief of the huge white creatures, his knees in the soft star-flame,
Lay loose in a place of shadow: we drew the reins by his side.

Golden the nails of his bird-claws, flung loosely along the dim ground;
In one was a branch soft-shining, with bells more many than sighs,
In midst of an old man's bosom; owls ruffling and pacing around,
Sidled their bodies against him, filling the shade with their eyes.

And my gaze was thronged with the sleepers; no, not since the world began,
In realms where the handsome were many, nor in glamours by demons flung,
Have faces alive with such beauty been known to the salt eye of man,
Yet weary with passions that faded when the seven-fold seas were young.

And I gazed on the bell-branch, sleep's forebear, far sung by the Sennachies.
I saw how those slumberers, grown weary, there camping in grasses deep,
Of wars with the wide world and pacing the shores of the wandering seas,
Laid hands on the bell-branch and swayed it, and fed of unhuman sleep.

Snatching the horn of Niam, I blew a lingering note;
Came sound from those monstrous sleepers, a sound like the stirring of flies.
He, shaking the fold of his lips, and heaving the pillar of his throat,
Watched me with mournful wonder out of the wells of his eyes.

I cried, "Come out of the shadow, king of the nails of gold!
"And tell of your goodly household and the goodly works of your hands,
"That we may muse in the starlight and talk of the battles of old;
"Your questioner, Usheen, is worthy, he comes from the Fenian lands."

Half open his eyes were, and held me, dull with the smoke of their dreams;
His lips moved slowly in answer, no answer out of them came;
Then he swayed in his fingers the bell-branch, slow dropping a sound in faint streams
Softer than snow-flakes in April and piercing the marrow like flame.

Wrapt in the wave of that music, with weariness more than of earth,
The moil of my centuries filled me; and gone like a sea-covered stone
Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow and the memories of the whole of my mirth,
And a softness came from the starlight and filled me full to the bone.

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid my body as low;
And the pearl-pale Niam lay by me, her brow on the midst of my breast;
And the horse was gone in the distance, and years after years ‘gan flow;
Square leaves of the ivy moved over us, binding us down to our rest.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I forgot;
How the fetlocks drip blood in the battle, when the fallen on fallen lie rolled;
How the falconer follows the falcon in the weeds of the heron’s plot,
And the names of the demons whose hammers made armour for Conhor of old.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I forgot;
That the spear-shaft is made out of ashwood, the shield out of ozier and hide;
How the hammers spring on the anvil, on the spearhead’s burning spot;
How the slow, blue-eyed oxen of Finn low sadly at evening tide.

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driving the dust with their throngs,
Moved round me, of seamen or landsmen, all who are winter tales;
Came by me the kings of the Red Branch, with roaring of laughter and songs,
Or moved as they moved once, love-making or piercing the tempest with sails.

Came Blanid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who feastward of old time slunk,
Cook Barach, the traitor; and warward, the spittle on his beard never dry,
Dark Balor, as old as a forest, car borne, his mighty head sunk
Helpless, men lifting the lids of his weary and death-making eye.

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in loud streams,
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle of bone,
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not, with creatures of dreams,
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a stone.

At times our slumber was lightened. When the sun was on silver or gold;
When brushed with the wings of the owls, in the dimness they love going by;
When a glow-worm was green on a grass leaf, lured from his lair in the mould;
Half wakening, we lifted our eyelids, and gazed on the grass with a sigh.

So watched I when, man of the croziers, at the heel of a century fell,
Weak, in the midst of the meadow, from his miles in the midst of the air,
A starling like them that forgathered ‘neath a moon waking white as a shell.
When the Fenians made foray at morning with Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair.

I awoke: the strange horse without summons out of the distance ran,
Thrusting his nose to my shoulder; he knew in his bosom deep
That once more moved in my bosom the ancient sadness of man,
And that I would leave the immortals, their dimness, their dews dropping sleep.

O, had you seen beautiful Niam grow white as the waters are white,
Lord of the croziers, you even had lifted your hands and wept:
But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering alone that delight
Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs impatiently stept.

I cried, “O Niam! O white one! if only a twelve-houred day,
“I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where the old men and young
“In the Fenians’ dwellings of wattle lean on the chessboards and play,
“Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan’s slanderous tongue!

“Like me were some galley forsaken far off in Meridian isle.
“Remembering its long-oared companions, sails turning to thread-bare rags;
“No more to crawl on the seas with long oars mile after mile,
“But to be amid shooting of flies and flowering of rushes and flags.”

Their motionless eyeballs of spirits grown mild with mysterious thought
Watched her those seamless faces from the valley’s glimmering girth;
As she murmured, “O wandering Usheen, the strength of the bell-branch is naught,
“For there moves alive in your fingers the fluttering sadness of earth.

“Then go through the lands in the saddle and see what the mortals do,
“And softly come to your Niam over the tops of the tide;
“But weep for your Niam, O Usheen, weep; for if only your shoe

“Brush lightly as haymouse earth’s pebbles, you will come no more to my side.

“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your rest?”
“I saw from a distant saddle; from the earth she made her moan;
“I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn, for breast unto breast
“We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their sweetness lone.

“In the isles of the farthest seas where only the spirits come.
“Were the winds less soft than the breath of a pigeon who sleeps on her nest,
“Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound of the sea’s vague drum?
“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your rest?”

The wailing grew distant; I rode by the woods of the wrinkling bark,
Where ever is murmurous dropping, old silence and that one sound;
For no live creatures live there, no weasels move in the dark;
In a reverie forgetful of all things, over the bubbling ground.

And I rode by the plains of the sea’s edge, where all is barren and gray,
Gray sands on the green of the grasses and over the dripping trees,
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would hasten away,
Like an army of old men lounging for rest from the moan of the seas.

And the winds made the sands on the sea’s edge turning and turning go,
As my mind made the names of the Fenians. Far from the hazel and oak,
I rode away on the surges, where, high as the saddle bow,
Fled foam underneath me, and round me, a wandering and milky smoke.

Long fled the foam-flakes around me, the winds fled out of the vast,
Snatching the bird in secret; nor knew I, embosomed apart,
When they froze the cloth on my body like armour riveted fast,
For Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in the gates of my heart.

Till fattening the winds of the morning, an odour of new-mown hay
Came, and my forehead fell low, and my tears like berries fell down;
Later a sound came, half lost in the sound of a shore far away,
From the great grass-barnacle calling, and later the shore-weeds brown.

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs crushing the sand and the shells,
Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes, a chaunt of love on my lips,
Not coughing, my head on my knees, and praying, and wroth with the bells,
I would leave no saint's head on his body from Rachlin to Bera of ships.

Making way from the kindling surges, I rode on a bridle-path
Much wondering to see upon all hands, of wattles and woodwork made,
Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless the sacred cairn and the rath,
And a small and a feeble populace stooping with mattock and spade.

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining with much-toil wet;
While in this place and that place, with bodies unglorious, their chieftains stood,
Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered one, caught in your net:
Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the roaring of wind in a wood.

And because I went by them so huge and so speedy with eyes so bright,
Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old man lifted his head:
And I rode and I rode, and I cried out, "The Fenians hunt wolves in the

night,
So sleep thee by daytime." A voice cried, "The Fenians a long time are dead."

A whitebeard stood hushed on the pathway, the flesh of his face as dried grass,
And in folds round his eyes and his mouth, he sad as a child without milk;
And the dreams of the islands were gone, and I knew how men sorrow and pass,
And their hound, and their horse, and their love, and their eyes that glimmer like silk.

And wrapping my face in my hair, I murmured, "In old age they ceased";
And my tears were larger than berries, and I murmured, "Where white clouds lie spread
"On Crevroe or broad Knockfefin, with many of old they feast
"On the floors of the gods." He cried, "No, the gods a long time are dead."

And lonely and longing for Niam, I shivered and turned me about,
The heart in me longing to leap like a grasshopper into her heart;
I turned and rode to the westward, and followed the sea's old shout
Till I saw where Maive lies sleeping till starlight and midnight part.

And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a sack full of sand,
They bore it with staggering and sweating, but fell with their burden at length:
Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle, I flung it five yards with my hand,
With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob for the Fenian's old strength.

The rest you have heard of, O croziered one; how, when divided the girth,
I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a summer fly;
And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and walked on the earth,
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry.

How the men of the sand-sack showed me a church with its belfry in air;
Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in my dim eyes the crozier gleams;
What place have Caolte and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair?
Speak, you too are old with your memories, an old man surrounded with dreams.

S. PATRIC

Where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the burning stones is their place;
Where the demons whip them with wires on the burning stones of wide hell,
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and the smile on God's face,
Between them a gateway of brass, and the howl of the angels who fell.

USHEEN

Put the staff in my hands; for I go to the Fenians, O cleric, to chaunt
The war-songs that roused them of old; they will rise, making clouds with their breath
Innumerable, singing, exultant; the clay underneath them shall pant,
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled beneath them in death.

And demons afraid in their darkness; deep horror of eyes and of wings,
Afraid their ears on the earth laid, shall listen and rise up and weep;

Hearing the shaking of shields and the quiver of stretched bowstrings,
Hearing hell loud with a murmur, as shouting and mocking we sweep.

We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter the gateway of brass
And enter, and none sayeth “No” when there enters the strongly armed guest;
Make clean as a broom cleans, and march on as oxen move over young grass;
Then feast, making converse of wars, and of old wounds, and turn to our rest.

S. PATRIC

On the flaming stones, without refuge, the limbs of the Fenians are tost;
None war on the masters of Hell, who could break up the world in their rage;
But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your soul that is lost
Through the demon love of its youth and its godless and passionate age.

USHEEN

Ah, me! to be shaken with coughing and broken with old age and pain,
Without laughter, a show unto children, alone with remembrance and fear;
All emptied of purple hours as a beggar’s cloak in the rain,
As a hay-cock out on the flood, or a wolf sucked under a weir.

It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man I loved of old there;
I throw down the chain of small stones! when life in my body has ceased,
I will go to Caolte, and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast.

THE SONG OF THE HAPPY SHEPHERD

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Gray Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good.
Where are now the warring kings,
Word be-mockers? — By the Rood
Where are now the warring kings?
An idle word is now their glory,
By the stammering schoolboy said,
Reading some entangled story:
The kings of the old time are fled
The wandering earth herself may be
Only a sudden flaming word,
In clanging space a moment heard,
Troubling the endless reverie.

Then nowise worship dusty deeds,
Nor seek; for this is also sooth;
To hunger fiercely after truth,
Lest all thy toiling only breeds
New dreams, new dreams; there is no truth

Saving in thine own heart. Seek, then,
No learning from the starry men,
Who follow with the optic glass
The whirling ways of stars that pass —
Seek, then, for this is also sooth,
No word of theirs — the cold star-bane
Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
And dead is all their human truth.
Go gather by the humming-sea
Some twisted, echo-harbouring shell,
And to its lips thy story tell,
And they thy comforters will be,
Rewarding in melodious guile,
Thy fretful words a little while,
Till they shall singing fade in ruth,
And die a pearly brotherhood;
For words alone are certain good:
Sing, then, for this is also sooth.

I must be gone: there is a grave
Where daffodil and lily wave,
And I would please the hapless faun,
Buried under the sleepy ground,
With mirthful songs before the dawn.
His shouting days with mirth were crowned;
And still I dream he treads the lawn,
Walking ghostly in the dew,
Pierced by my glad singing through,
My songs of old earth’s dreamy youth:

But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!
For fair are poppies on the brow:
Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.

THE SAD SHEPHERD

There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,
And he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming,
Went walking with slow steps along the gleaming
And humming sands, where windy surges wend:
And he called loudly to the stars to bend
From their pale thrones and comfort him, but they
Among themselves laugh on and sing alway:
And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend
Cried out, *Dim sea, hear my most piteous story!*
The sea swept on and cried her old cry still,
Rolling along in dreams from hill to hill;
He fled the persecution of her glory
And, in a far-off, gentle valley stopping,
Cried all his story to the dewdrops glistening,
But naught they heard, for they are always listening,
The dewdrops, for the sound of their own dropping.
And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend,
Sought once again the shore, and found a shell,
And thought, *I will my heavy story tell*
Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send
Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;
And my own tale again for me shall sing,
And my own whispering words be comforting,
And lo! my ancient burden may depart.
Then he sang softly nigh the pearly rim;
But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone

Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.

THE CLOAK, THE BOAT, AND THE SHOES

“What do you make so fair and bright?”

“I make the cloak of Sorrow:
“O, lovely to see in all men’s sight
“Shall be the cloak of Sorrow,
“In all men’s sight.”

“What do you build with sails for flight?”

“I build a boat for Sorrow,
“O, swift on the seas all day and night
“Saileth the rover Sorrow,
“All day and night.”

“What do you weave with wool so white?

“I weave the shoes of Sorrow,
“Soundless shall be the footfall light
“In all men’s ears of Sorrow,
“Sudden and light.”

ANASHUYA AND VIJAYA

A little Indian temple in the Golden Age. Around it a garden; around that the forest. ANASHUYA, *the young priestess, kneeling within the temple*.

ANASHUYA

Send peace on all the lands and flickering corn. —
O, may tranquillity walk by his elbow
When wandering in the forest, if he love
No other. — Hear, and may the indolent flocks
Be plentiful. — And if he love another,
May panthers end him. — Hear, and load our king
With wisdom hour by hour. — May we two stand,
When we are dead, beyond the setting suns,
A little from the other shades apart,
With mingling hair, and play upon one lute.

VIJAYA [*entering and throwing a lily at her*]

Hail! hail, my Anashuya.

ANASHUYA

No: be still.
I, priestess of this temple, offer up
Prayers for the land.

VIJAYA

I will wait here, Amrita.

ANASHUYA

By mighty Brahma's ever rustling robe,
Who is Amrita? Sorrow of all sorrows!
Another fills your mind.

VIJAYA

My mother's name.

ANASHUYA [*sings, coming out of the temple*]

A sad, sad thought went by me slowly:
Sigh, O you little stars! O, sigh and shake your blue apparel!
The sad, sad thought has gone from me now wholly:
Sing, O you little stars! O, sing and raise your rapturous carol
To mighty Brahma, he who made you many as the sands,
And laid you on the gates of evening with his quiet hands.

[*Sits down on the steps of the temple.*]

Vijaya, I have brought my evening rice;
The sun has laid his chin on the gray wood,
Weary, with all his poppies gathered round him.

VIJAYA

The hour when Kama, full of sleepy laughter,
Rises, and showers abroad his fragrant arrows,
Piercing the twilight with their murmuring barbs.

ANASHUYA

See how the sacred old flamingoes come,
Painting with shadow all the marble steps:
Aged and wise, they seek their wonted perches
Within the temple, devious walking, made
To wander by their melancholy minds.
Yon tall one eyes my supper; swiftly chase him
Far, far away. I named him after you.
He is a famous fisher; hour by hour
He ruffles with his bill the minnowed streams.
Ah! there he snaps my rice. I told you so.
Now cuff him off. He's off! A kiss for you,
Because you saved my rice. Have you no thanks?

VIJAYA [*sings*]

Sing you of her, O first few stars,
Whom Brahma, touching with his finger, praises, for you hold
The van of wandering quiet; ere you be too calm and old,
Sing, turning in your cars,
Sing, till you raise your hands and sigh, and from your car heads peer,
With all your whirling hair, and drop many an azure tear.

ANASHUYA

What know the pilots of the stars of tears?

VIJAYA

Their faces are all worn, and in their eyes
Flashes the fire of sadness, for they see

The icicles that famish all the north,
Where men lie frozen in the glimmering snow;
And in the flaming forests cower the lion
And lioness, with all their whimpering cubs;
And, ever pacing on the verge of things,
The phantom, Beauty, in a mist of tears;
While we alone have round us woven woods,
And feel the softness of each other's hand,
Amrita, while — —

ANASHUYA [*going away from him*]

Ah me, you love another,

[*Bursting into tears.*]

And may some dreadful ill befall her quick!

VIJAYA

I loved another; now I love no other.
Among the mouldering of ancient woods
You live, and on the village border she,
With her old father the blind wood-cutter;
I saw her standing in her door but now.

ANASHUYA

Vijaya, swear to love her never more,

VIJAYA

Ay, ay.

ANASHUYA

Swear by the parents of the gods,
Dread oath, who dwell on sacred Himalay,
On the far Golden Peak; enormous shapes,
Who still were old when the great sea was young
On their vast faces mystery and dreams;
Their hair along the mountains rolled and filled
From year to year by the unnumbered nests
Of aweless birds, and round their stirless feet
The joyous flocks of deer and antelope,
Who never hear the unforgiving hound.
Swear!

VIJAYA

By the parents of the gods, I swear.

ANASHUYA [*sings*]

I have forgiven, O new star!
Maybe you have not heard of us, you have come forth so newly,
You hunter of the fields afar!
Ah, you will know my loved one by his hunter's arrows truly,
Shoot on him shafts of quietness, that he may ever keep
An inner laughter, and may kiss his hands to me in sleep.

Farewell, Vijaya. Nay, no word, no word;
I, priestess of this temple, offer up

Prayers for the land.

[VIJAYA *goes*.]

O Brahma, guard in sleep
The merry lambs and the complacent kine,
The flies below the leaves, and the young mice
In the tree roots, and all the sacred flocks
Of red flamingo; and my love, Vijaya;
And may no restless fay with fidget finger
Trouble his sleeping: give him dreams of me.

THE INDIAN UPON GOD

I passed along the water's edge below the humid trees,
My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes round my knees,
My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs; and saw the moorfowl pace
All dripping on a grassy slope, and saw them cease to chase
Each other round in circles, and heard the eldest speak:
Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong or weak
Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.
The rains are from His dripping wing, the moonbeams from His eye.
I passed a little further on and heard a lotus talk:
Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk,
For I am in His image made, and all this tinkling tide
Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.
A little way within the gloom a roebuck raised his eyes
Brimful of starlight, and he said: *The Stamper of the Skies,*
He is a gentle roebuck; for how else, I pray, could He
Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing like me?
I passed a little further on and heard a peacock say:
Who made the grass and made the worms and made my feathers gay,
He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all the night
His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light.

THE INDIAN TO HIS LOVE

The island dreams under the dawn
And great boughs drop tranquillity;
The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,
A parrot sways upon a tree,
Raging at his own image in the enamelled sea.

Here we will moor our lonely ship
And wander ever with woven hands,
Murmuring softly lip to lip,
Along the grass, along the sands,
Murmuring how far away are the unquiet lands:

How we alone of mortals are
Hid under quiet bows apart,
While our love grows an Indian star,
A meteor of the burning heart,
One with the tide that gleams, the wings that gleam and dart,
The heavy boughs, the burnished dove
That moans and sighs a hundred days:
How when we die our shades will rove,
When eve has hushed the feathered ways,
With vapoury footsole among the water's drowsy blaze.

THE FALLING OF THE LEAVES

Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,
And over the mice in the barley sheaves;
Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,
And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.

The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
And weary and worn are our sad souls now;
Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,
With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

EPHEMERA

“Your eyes that once were never weary of mine
“Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
“Because our love is waning.”

And then she:
“Although our love is waning, let us stand
“By the lone border of the lake once more,
“Together in that hour of gentleness
“When the poor tired child, Passion, falls asleep:
“How far away the stars seem, and how far
“Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!”

Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,
While slowly he whose hand held hers replied:
“Passion has often worn our wandering hearts.”

The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
A rabbit old and lame limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
On the lone border of the lake once more:
Turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves
Gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
In bosom and hair.

“Ah, do not mourn,” he said,
“That we are tired, for other loves await us;
“Hate on and love through unrepining hours.

“Before us lies eternity; our souls
“Are love, and a continual farewell.”

THE MADNESS OF KING GOLL

I sat on cushioned otter skin:
My word was law from Ith to Emen,
And shook at Invar Amargin
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen.
And drove tumult and war away
From girl and boy and man and beast;
The fields grew fatter day by day,
The wild fowl of the air increased;
And every ancient Ollave said,
While he bent down his fading head,
"He drives away the Northern cold."
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

I sat and mused and drank sweet wine;
A herdsman came from inland valleys,
Crying, the pirates drove his swine
To fill their dark-beaked hollow galleys.
I called my battle-breaking men,
And my loud brazen battle-cars
From rolling vale and rivery glen,
And under the blinking of the stars
Fell on the pirates by the deep,
And hurled them in the gulph of sleep:
These hands won many a torque of gold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

But slowly, as I shouting slew
And trampled in the bubbling mire,

In my most secret spirit grew
A whirling and a wandering fire:
I stood: keen stars above me shone,
Around me shone keen eyes of men:
I laughed aloud and hurried on
By rocky shore and rushy fen;
I laughed because birds fluttered by,
And starlight gleamed, and clouds flew high,
And rushes waved and waters rolled.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

And now I wander in the woods
When summer gluts the golden bees,
Or in autumnal solitudes
Arise the leopard-coloured trees;
Or when along the wintry strands
The cormorants shiver on their rocks;
I wander on, and wave my hands,
And sing, and shake my heavy locks.
The gray wolf knows me; by one ear
I lead along the woodland deer;
The hares run by me growing bold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

I came upon a little town,
That slumbered in the harvest moon,
And passed a-tiptoe up and down,
Murmuring, to a fitful tune,
How I have followed, night and day,

A tramping of tremendous feet,
And saw where this old tympan lay,
Deserted on a doorway seat,
And bore it to the woods with me;
Of some unhuman misery
Our married voiced wildly trolled.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

I sang how, when day's toil is done,
Orchil shakes out her long dark hair
That hides away the dying sun
And sheds faint odours through the air:
When my hand passed from wire to wire
It quenched, with sound like falling dew,
The whirling and the wandering fire;
But lift a mournful ulalu,
For the kind wires are torn and still,
And I must wander wood and hill
Through summer's heat and winter's cold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

THE STOLEN CHILD

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries,
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim gray sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams,
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping than he can understand.

TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER

Shy one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room,
Shy in the doorway
And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,
Helpful and shy.
To an isle in the water
With her would I fly.

DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

THE MEDITATION OF THE OLD FISHERMAN

You waves, though you dance by my feet like children at play,
Though you glow and you glance, though you purr and you dart;
In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves were more gay,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;
My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart
That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so fair when his oar
Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and apart,
Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

THE BALLAD OF FATHER O'HART

Good Father John O'Hart
In penal days rode out
To a shoneen who had free lands
And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands;
Sleiveens were all his race;
And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,
And they married beyond their place.

But Father John went up,
And Father John went down;
And he wore small holes in his shoes,
And he wore large holes in his gown.

All loved him, only the shoneen,
Whom the devils have by the hair,
From the wives, and the cats, and the children,
To the birds in the white of the air.

The birds, for he opened their cages
As he went up and down;
And he said with a smile, "Have peace now";
And he went his way with a frown.

But if when any one died
Came keeners hoarser than rooks,
He bade them give over their keening;
For he was a man of books.

And these were the works of John,
When weeping score by score,
People came into Coloony;
For he’d died at ninety-four.

There was no human keening;
The birds from Knocknarea
And the world round Knocknashee
Came keening in that day.

The young birds and old birds
Came flying, heavy and sad;
Keening in from Tiraragh,
Keening from Ballinafad;

Keening from Inishmurray,
Nor stayed for bite or sup;
This way were all reproved
Who dig old customs up.

THE BALLAD OF MOLL MAGEE

Come round me, little childer;
There, don't fling stones at me
Because I mutter as I go;
But pity Moll Magee.

My man was a poor fisher
With shore lines in the say;
My work was saltin' herrings
The whole of the long day.

And sometimes from the saltin' shed,
I scarce could drag my feet
Under the blessed moonlight,
Along the pebbly street.

I'd always been but weakly,
And my baby was just born;
A neighbour minded her by day
I minded her till morn.

I lay upon my baby;
Ye little childer dear,
I looked on my cold baby
When the morn grew frosty and clear.

A weary woman sleeps so hard!
My man grew red and pale,
And gave me money, and bade me go
To my own place, Kinsale.

He drove me out and shut the door,
And gave his curse to me;
I went away in silence,
No neighbour could I see.

The windows and the doors were shut,
One star shone faint and green
The little straws were turnin' round
Across the bare boreen.

I went away in silence:
Beyond old Martin's byre
I saw a kindly neighbour
Blowin' her mornin' fire.

She drew from me my story —
My money's all used up,
And still, with pityin', scornin' eye,
She gives me bite and sup.

She says my man will surely come,
And fetch me home agin;
But always, as I'm movin' round,
Without doors or within,

Pilin' the wood or pilin' the turf,
Or goin' to the well,
I'm thinkin' of my baby
And keenin' to mysel'.

And sometimes I am sure she knows
When, openin’ wide His door,
God lights the stars, His candles,
And looks upon the poor.

So now, ye little childer,
Ye won’t fling stones at me;
But gather with your shinin’ looks
And pity Moll Magee.

THE BALLAD OF THE FOXHUNTER

“Now lay me in a cushioned chair
“And carry me, you four,
“With cushions here and cushions there,
“To see the world once more.

“And some one from the stables bring
“My Dermot dear and brown,
“And lead him gently in a ring,
“And gently up and down.

“Now leave the chair upon the grass:
“Bring hound and huntsman here,
“And I on this strange road will pass,
“Filled full of ancient cheer.”

His eyelids droop, his head falls low,
His old eyes cloud with dreams;
The sun upon all things that grow
Pours round in sleepy streams.

Brown Dermot treads upon the lawn,
And to the armchair goes,
And now the old man’s dreams are gone,
He smooths the long brown nose.

And now moves many a pleasant tongue
Upon his wasted hands,
For leading aged hounds and young
The huntsman near him stands.

“My huntsman, Rody, blow the horn,
“And make the hills reply.”
The huntsman loosens on the morn
A gay and wandering cry.

A fire is in the old man’s eyes,
His fingers move and sway,
And when the wandering music dies
They hear him feebly say,

“My huntsman, Rody, blow the horn,
“And make the hills reply.”
“I cannot blow upon my horn,
“I can but weep and sigh.”

The servants round his cushioned place
Are with new sorrow wrung;
And hounds are gazing on his face,
Both aged hounds and young.

One blind hound only lies apart
On the sun-smitten grass;
He holds deep commune with his heart:
The moments pass and pass;

The blind hound with a mournful din
Lifts slow his wintry head;
The servants bear the body in;
The hounds wail for the dead.

The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics

OR

THE ROSE

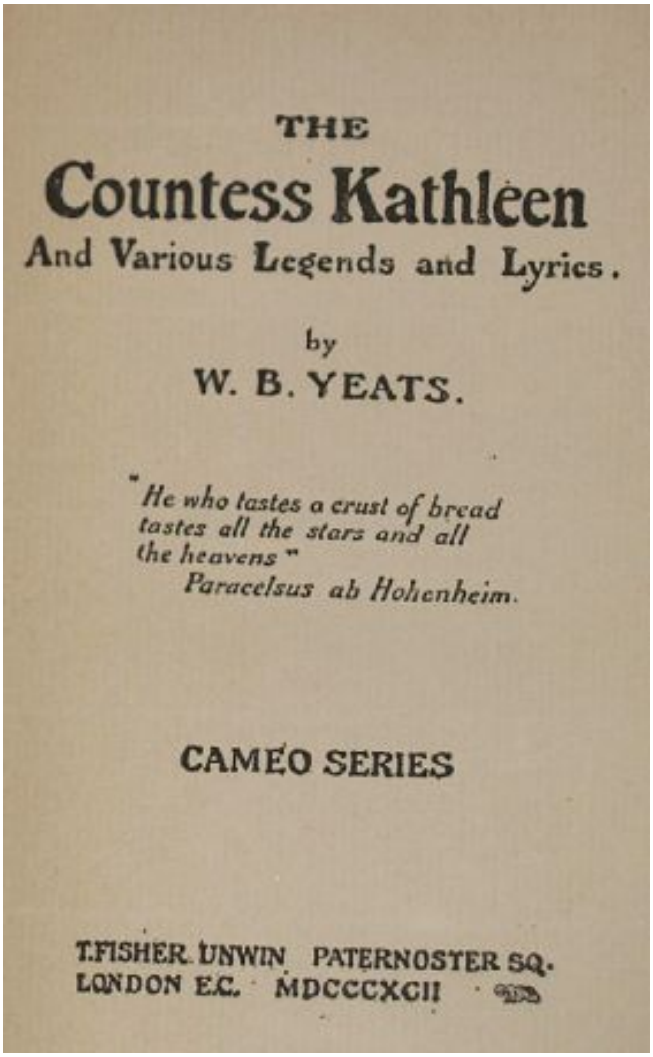
Published for the first time in 1892, this is Yeats' second poetry collection, which includes the play *The Countess Kathleen* and a group of short lyrics. These poems were later collected under the title of *The Rose* in Yeats' *Collected Poems*. Many of the works reflect Yeats' interest in alchemy and esotericism, but the collection is more notable for containing the poet's most celebrated poem, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree,* which was written in 1888. The poem was first published in the National *Observer* in 1890 and was inspired Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Yeats later described his inspiration for the poem by saying that while he was a teenager, he wished to imitate the American Transcendentalist by living on an uninhabited island in Lough Gill, which he titled as Innisfree in the poem. When Yeats was living in London, he often walked down Fleet Street, dreaming of the seclusion of a pastoral setting such as the isle. One evening the poet glimpsed a water fountain, with a rock suspended over it, in a shop window, and this gave him the idea for the isle. He returned home at once and began writing the poem.

In his youth, Yeats often visited the land at Lough Gill at night, sometimes accompanied by his cousin Henry Middleton. On one occasion, they went out onto the lake at night on a yacht to observe birds and to listen to stories by the crew. The trips that Yeats took from the streets of Sligo to

the remote areas around the lake also influenced what would become his most famous poem.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree is a twelve line poem, divided into three quatrains. The poem concerns the narrator's longing for Innisfree, while residing in an unpleasant urban setting, presumably London. The narrator yearns to return to the peace and tranquility, and so escape the noise and troubles of the city. Innisfree represents for the poet a return to nature and the desire for the realms of fantasy over the holds of harsh reality.

The first edition



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Fleet Street in 1888, the year Yeats wrote his famous poem. Nearby this scene there was a shop with a rock fountain, which inspired the poet to write 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'.

Lough Gill, a freshwater lake in County Sligo, and the model for Innisfree

THE ROSE

"*Sero te amavi, Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova! Sero te amavi.*"

S. Augustine.

TO LIONEL JOHNSON

TO THE ROSE UPON THE ROOD OF TIME

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, gray, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver sandalled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.
Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

Come near, come near, come near — Ah, leave me still
A little space for the rose-breath to fill!
Lest I no more hear common things that crave;
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,
The field mouse running by me in the grass,
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;
But seek alone to hear the strange things said
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,
And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.
Come near; I would, before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.

FERGUS AND THE DRUID

FERGUS

The whole day have I followed in the rocks,
And you have changed and flowed from shape to shape.
First as a raven on whose ancient wings
Scarcely a feather lingered, then you seemed
A weasel moving on from stone to stone,
And now at last you wear a human shape,
A thin gray man half lost in gathering night.

DRUID

What would you, king of the proud Red Branch kings?

FERGUS

This would I say, most wise of living souls:
Young subtle Concobar sat close by me
When I gave judgment, and his words were wise,
And what to me was burden without end,
To him seemed easy, so I laid the crown
Upon his head to cast away my care.

DRUID

What would you, king of the proud Red Branch kings?

FERGUS

I feast amid my people on the hill,
And pace the woods, and drive my chariot wheels
In the white border of the murmuring sea;
And still I feel the crown upon my head.

DRUID

What would you?

FERGUS

I would be no more a king
But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours.

DRUID

Look on my thin gray hair and hollow cheeks
And on these hands that may not lift the sword
This body trembling like a wind-blown reed.
No woman loves me, no man seeks my help,
Because I be not of the things I dream.

FERGUS

A wild and foolish labourer is a king,
To do and do and do, and never dream.

DRUID

Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams;
Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you round.

FERGUS

I see my life go dripping like a stream
From change to change; I have been many things,
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a chair of gold,
And all these things were wonderful and great;
But now I have grown nothing, being all,
And the whole world weighs down upon my heart:
Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow
Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured bag!

THE DEATH OF CUCHULAIN

A man came slowly from the setting sun,
To Forgail's daughter, Emer, in her dun,
And found her dyeing cloth with subtle care,
And said, casting aside his draggled hair:
"I am Aleel, the swineherd, whom you bid
"Go dwell upon the sea cliffs, vapour hid;
"But now my years of watching are no more."

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor,
And stretching out her arms, red with the dye,
Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry.

Looking on her, Aleel, the swineherd, said:
"Not any god alive, nor mortal dead,
"Has slain so mighty armies, so great kings,
"Nor won the gold that now Cuchulain brings."

"Why do you tremble thus from feet to crown?"

Aleel, the swineherd, wept and cast him down
Upon the web-heaped floor, and thus his word:
"With him is one sweet-throated like a bird."

"Who bade you tell these things?" and then she cried
To those about, "Beat him with thongs of hide
"And drive him from the door."

And thus it was:
And where her son, Finmole, on the smooth grass

Was driving cattle, came she with swift feet,
And called out to him, “Son, it is not meet
“That you stay idling here with flocks and herds.”

“I have long waited, mother, for those words:
“But wherefore now?”

“There is a man to die;
“You have the heaviest arm under the sky.”

“My father dwells among the sea-worn bands,
“And breaks the ridge of battle with his hands.”

“Nay, you are taller than Cuchulain, son.”

“He is the mightiest man in ship or dun.”

“Nay, he is old and sad with many wars,
“And weary of the crash of battle cars.”

“I only ask what way my journey lies,
“For God, who made you bitter, made you wise.”

“The Red Branch kings a tireless banquet keep,
“Where the sun falls into the Western deep.
“Go there, and dwell on the green forest rim;
“But tell alone your name and house to him
“Whose blade compels, and bid them send you one
“Who has a like vow from their triple dun.”

Between the lavish shelter of a wood
And the gray tide, the Red Branch multitude
Feasted, and with them old Cuchulain dwelt,
And his young dear one close beside him knelt,
And gazed upon the wisdom of his eyes,
More mournful than the depth of starry skies,
And pondered on the wonder of his days;
And all around the harp-string told his praise,
And Concobar, the Red Branch king of kings,
With his own fingers touched the brazen strings.
At last Cuchulain spake, "A young man strays
"Driving the deer along the woody ways.
"I often hear him singing to and fro,
"I often hear the sweet sound of his bow,
"Seek out what man he is."

One went and came.
"He bade me let all know he gives his name
"At the sword point, and bade me bring him one
"Who had a like vow from our triple dun."

"I only of the Red Branch hosted now,"
Cuchulain cried, "have made and keep that vow."

After short fighting in the leafy shade,
He spake to the young man, "Is there no maid
"Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you round,
"Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground,
"That you come here to meet this ancient sword?"

“The dooms of men are in God’s hidden hoard.”

“Your head a while seemed like a woman’s head
“That I loved once.”

Again the fighting sped,
But now the war rage in Cuchulain woke,
And through the other’s shield his long blade broke,
And pierced him.

“Speak before your breath is done.”
“I am Finmole, mighty Cuchulain’s son.”

“I put you from your pain. I can no more.”

While day its burden on to evening bore,
With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain stayed;
Then Concobar sent that sweet-throated maid,
And she, to win him, his gray hair caressed;
In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.
Then Concobar, the subtlest of all men,
Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,
Spake thus, “Cuchulain will dwell there and brood,
“For three days more in dreadful quietude,
“And then arise, and raving slay us all.
“Go, cast on him delusions magical,
“That he might fight the waves of the loud sea.”
And ten by ten under a quicken tree,
The Druids chaunted, swaying in their hands
Tall wands of alder, and white quicken wands.

In three days' time, Cuchulain with a moan
Stood up, and came to the long sands alone:
For four days warred he with the bitter tide;
And the waves flowed above him, and he died.

THE ROSE OF THE WORLD

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place,
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;
He made the world to be a grassy road
Before her wandering feet.

THE ROSE OF PEACE

If Michael, leader of God's host
When Heaven and Hell are met,
Looked down on you from Heaven's door-post
He would his deeds forget.

Brooding no more upon God's wars
In his Divine homestead,
He would go weave out of the stars
A chaplet for your head.

And all folk seeing him bow down,
And white stars tell your praise,
Would come at last to God's great town,
Led on by gentle ways;

And God would bid His warfare cease.
Saying all things were well;
And softly make a rosy peace,
A peace of Heaven with Hell.

THE ROSE OF BATTLE

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled
Above the tide of hours, trouble the air,
And God's bell buoyed to be the water's care;
While hushed from fear, or loud with hope, a band
With blown, spray-dabbled hair gather at hand.
Turn if you may from battles never done,
I call, as they go by me one by one,
Danger no refuge holds; and war no peace,
For him who hears love sing and never cease,
Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade:
But gather all for whom no love hath made
A woven silence, or but came to cast
A song into the air, and singing past
To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you
Who have sought more than is in rain or dew
Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,
Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,
Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips
And wage God's battles in the long gray ships.
The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,
To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell;
God's bell has claimed them by the little cry
Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
You, too, have come where the dim tides are hurled

Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring
The bell that calls us on; the sweet far thing.
Beauty grown sad with its eternity
Made you of us, and of the dim gray sea.
Our long ships loose thought-woven sails and wait,
For God has bid them share an equal fate;
And when at last defeated in His wars,
They have gone down under the same white stars,
We shall no longer hear the little cry
Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

A FAERY SONG

Sung by the people of faery over Diarmuid and Grania, who lay in their bridal sleep under a Cromlech.

We who are old, old and gay,
O so old!
Thousands of years, thousands of years,
If all were told:

Give to these children, new from the world,
Silence and love;
And the long dew-dropping hours of the night,
And the stars above:

Give to these children, new from the world,
Rest far from men.
Is anything better, anything better?
Tell us it then:

Us who are old, old and gay,
O so old!
Thousands of years, thousands of years,
If all were told.

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

A CRADLE SONG

"*Coth yani me von gilli beg,*
'N heur ve thu more a creena."

The angels are stooping
Above your bed;
They weary of trooping
With the whimpering dead.

God's laughing in heaven
To see you so good;
The Shining Seven
Are gay with His mood.

I kiss you and kiss you,
My pigeon, my own;
Ah, how I shall miss you
When you have grown.

THE PITY OF LOVE

A pity beyond all telling
Is hid in the heart of love:
The folk who are buying and selling
The clouds on their journey above
The cold wet winds ever blowing
And the shadowy hazel grove
Where mouse-gray waters are flowing
Threaten the head that I love.

THE SORROW OF LOVE

The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,
The full round moon and the star-laden sky,
And the loud song of the ever-singing leaves,
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

And then you came with those red mournful lips,
And with you came the whole of the world's tears
And all the trouble of her labouring ships,
And all the trouble of her myriad years.

And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,
The curd-pale moon, the white stars in the sky,
And the loud chaunting of the unquiet leaves,
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry.

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true;
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

THE WHITE BIRDS

I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea!
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee;
And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on the rim of the sky,
Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that may not die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew dabbled, the lily and rose;
Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor that goes,
Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the fall of the dew:
For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering foam: I and you!

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more;
Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea!

A DREAM OF DEATH

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
Near no accustomed hand;
And they had nailed the boards above her face
The peasants of that land,
Wondering to lay her in that solitude,
And raised above her mound
A cross they had made out of two bits of wood,
And planted cypress round;
And left her to the indifferent stars above
Until I carved these words:
She was more beautiful than thy first love,
But now lies under boards.

A DREAM OF A BLESSED SPIRIT

All the heavy days are over;
Leave the body's coloured pride
Underneath the grass and clover,
With the feet laid side by side.

One with her are mirth and duty,
Bear the gold embroidered dress,
For she needs not her sad beauty,
To the scented oaken press.

Hers the kiss of Mother Mary,
The long hair is on her face;
Still she goes with footsteps wary,
Full of earth's old timid grace.

With white feet of angels seven
Her white feet go glimmering
And above the deep of heaven,
Flame on flame and wing on wing.

WHO GOES WITH FERGUS?

Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fears no more.

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon Love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair;
His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
And he had known at last some tenderness,
Before earth made of him her sleepy care;
But when a man poured fish into a pile,
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
And sang how day a Druid twilight sheds
Upon a dim, green, well-beloved isle,
Where people love beside star-laden seas;
How Time may never mar their faery vows
Under the woven roofs of quicken boughs:
The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lisadill;
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
And he had known at last some prudent years
Before they heaped his grave under the hill;
But while he passed before a plashy place,
A lug-worm with its gray and muddy mouth
Sang how somewhere to north or west or south
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race;
And how beneath those three times blessed skies
A Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons,
And as it falls awakens leafy tunes:
And at that singing he was no more wise.

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,
He mused upon his mockers: without fail

His sudden vengeance were a country tale,
Now that deep earth has drunk his body in;
But one small knot-grass growing by the pool
Told where, ah, little, all-unneeded voice!
Old Silence bids a lonely folk rejoice,
And chaplet their calm brows with leafage cool,
And how, when fades the sea-strewn rose of day,
A gentle feeling wraps them like a fleece,
And all their trouble dies into its peace:
The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall;
And might have known at last unhaunted sleep
Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,
Now that old earth had taken man and all:
Were not the worms that spired about his bones
A-telling with their low and reedy cry,
Of how God leans His hands out of the sky,
To bless that isle with honey in His tones;
That none may feel the power of squall and wave
And no one any leaf-crowned dancer miss
Until He burn up Nature with a kiss:
The man has found no comfort in the grave.

THE DEDICATION TO A BOOK OF STORIES SELECTED FROM THE IRISH NOVELISTS

There was a green branch hung with many a bell
When her own people ruled in wave-worn Eire;
And from its murmuring greenness, calm of faery,
A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell.

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,
And turned the farmer's memory from his cattle,
And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of battle,
For all who heard it dreamed a little while.

Ah, Exiles wandering over many seas,
Spinning at all times Eire's good to-morrow!
Ah, worldwide Nation, always growing Sorrow!
I also bear a bell branch full of ease.

I tore it from green boughs winds tossed and hurled,
Green boughs of tossing always, weary, weary!
I tore it from the green boughs of old Eire,
The willow of the many-sorrowed world.

Ah, Exiles, wandering over many lands!
My bell branch murmurs: the gay bells bring laughter,
Leaping to shake a cobweb from the rafter;
The sad bells bow the forehead on the hands.

A honeyed ringing: under the new skies
They bring you memories of old village faces,

Cabins gone now, old well-sides, old dear places;
And men who loved the cause that never dies.

THE LAMENTATION OF THE OLD PENSIONER

I had a chair at every hearth,
When no one turned to see,
With “Look at that old fellow there,
“And who may he be?”
And therefore do I wander now,
And the fret lies on me.

The road-side trees keep murmuring
Ah, wherefore murmur ye,
As in the old days long gone by,
Green oak and poplar tree?
The well-known faces are all gone
And the fret lies on me.

THE BALLAD OF FATHER GILLIGAN

The old priest Peter Gilligan
Was weary night and day;
For half his flock were in their beds,
Or under green sods lay.

Once, while he nodded on a chair,
At the moth-hour of eve,
Another poor man sent for him,
And he began to grieve.

“I have no rest, nor joy, nor peace,
“For people die and die”;
And after cried he, “God forgive!
“My body spake, not I!”

He knelt, and leaning on the chair
He prayed and fell asleep;
And the moth-hour went from the fields,
And stars began to peep.

They slowly into millions grew,
And leaves shook in the wind;
And God covered the world with shade,
And whispered to mankind.

Upon the time of sparrow chirp
When the moths came once more,
The old priest Peter Gilligan
Stood upright on the floor.

“Mavrone, mavrone! the man has died,
“While I slept on the chair”;
He roused his horse out of its sleep,
And rode with little care.

He rode now as he never rode,
By rocky lane and fen;
The sick man’s wife opened the door:
“Father! you come again!”

“And is the poor man dead?” he cried,
“He died an hour ago,”
The old priest Peter Gilligan
In grief swayed to and fro.

“When you were gone, he turned and died
“As merry as a bird.”
The old priest Peter Gilligan
He knelt him at that word.

“He who hath made the night of stars
“For souls, who tire and bleed,
“Sent one of His great angels down
“To help me in my need.

“He who is wrapped in purple robes,
“With planets in His care,
“Had pity on the least of things
“Asleep upon a chair.”

THE TWO TREES

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.
The changing colours of its fruit
Have dowered the stars with merry light;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night;
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody,
And made my lips and music wed,
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.
There, through bewildered branches, go
Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
Tossing and tossing to and fro
The flaming circle of our life.
When looking on their shaken hair,
And dreaming how they dance and dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

Gaze no more in the bitter glass
The demons, with their subtle guile,
Lift up before us when they pass,
Or only gaze a little while;
For there a fatal image grows,
With broken boughs, and blackened leaves,

And roots half hidden under snows
Driven by a storm that ever grieves.
For all things turn to barrenness
In the dim glass the demons hold,
The glass of outer weariness,
Made when God slept in times of old.
There, through the broken branches, go
The ravens of unresting thought;
Peering and flying to and fro
To see men’s souls bartered and bought.
When they are heard upon the wind,
And when they shake their wings; alas!
Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES

Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of that company,
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page;
For in the world's first blossoming age
The light fall of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;
And still the starry candles flare
To help her light foot here and there;
And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon her holy quietude.

Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because to him, who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,
That God gives unto man in sleep.
For the elemental beings go
About my table to and fro.
In flood and fire and clay and wind,
They huddle from man's pondering mind;

Yet he who treads in austere ways
May surely meet their ancient gaze.
Man ever journeys on with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
A Druid land, a Druid tune!

While still I may, I write for you
The love I lived, the dream I knew.
From our birthday, until we die,
Is but the winking of an eye;
And we, our singing and our love,
The mariners of night above,
And all the wizard things that go
About my table to and fro.
Are passing on to where may be,
In truth's consuming ecstasy
No place for love and dream at all;
For God goes by with white foot-fall.
I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart went with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.

The Wind Among the Reeds

This anthology was published in 1899 and contains, among other famous poems, *Song of the Old Mother*, which concerns the harshness of life for the Irish peasantry. Written in the first person, this poem explains the difficult chores of an aged woman and her bitter resentment to her children, whose worries for love and personal appearance appear insignificant compared to the toils of the the unfortunate mother. It is a formally structured ten line, ten syllable poem, with a rhyming style that imitates the tone of a nursery rhyme, inverting the poem's serious nature. In contrast, the collection also contains *The Fiddler of Dooner*, which is a comical and light-hearted poem, celebrating the Irish love of music and revelry.

Yeats, close to the time of publication

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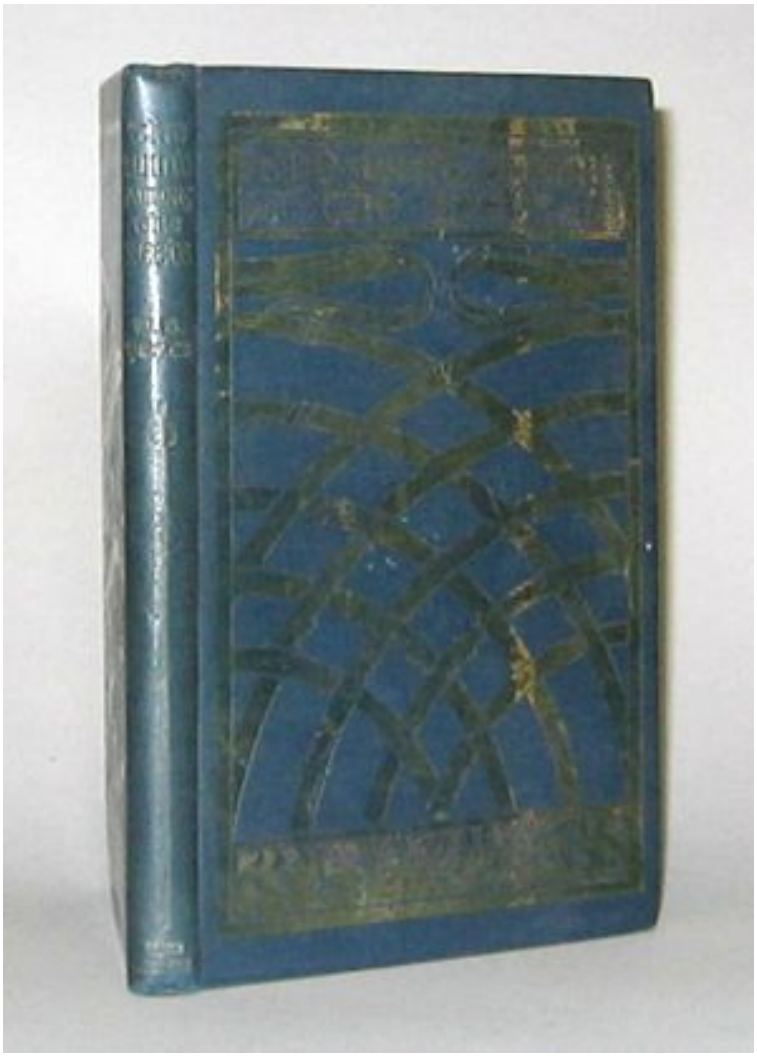

The first edition

THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare;
Caolte tossing his burning hair
And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a-gleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;
And if any gaze on our rushing band,
We come between him and the deed of his hand,
We come between him and the hope of his heart.
The host is rushing ‘twixt night and day,
And where is there hope or deed as fair?
Caolte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away*.

THE EVERLASTING VOICES

O sweet everlasting Voices be still;
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold
And bid them wander obeying your will
Flame under flame, till Time be no more;
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
O sweet everlasting Voices be still.

THE MOODS

Time drops in decay,
Like a candle burnt out,
And the mountains and woods
Have their day, have their day;
What one in the rout
Of the fire-born moods,
Has fallen away?

AEDH TELLS OF THE ROSE IN HIS HEART

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, remade, like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms
a rose in the deeps of my heart.

THE HOST OF THE AIR

O’Driscoll drove with a song,
The wild duck and the drake,
From the tall and the tufted reeds
Of the drear Hart Lake.

And he saw how the reeds grew dark
At the coming of night tide,
And dreamed of the long dim hair
Of Bridget his bride.

He heard while he sang and dreamed
A piper piping away,
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay.

And he saw young men and young girls
Who danced on a level place
And Bridget his bride among them,
With a sad and a gay face.

The dancers crowded about him,
And many a sweet thing said,
And a young man brought him red wine
And a young girl white bread.

But Bridget drew him by the sleeve,
Away from the merry bands,
To old men playing at cards
With a twinkling of ancient hands.

The bread and the wine had a doom,
For these were the host of the air;
He sat and played in a dream
Of her long dim hair.

He played with the merry old men
And thought not of evil chance,
Until one bore Bridget his bride
Away from the merry dance.

He bore her away in his arms,
The handsomest young man there,
And his neck and his breast and his arms
Were drowned in her long dim hair.

O’Driscoll scattered the cards
And out of his dream awoke:
Old men and young men and young girls
Were gone like a drifting smoke;

But he heard high up in the air
A piper piping away,
And never was piping so sad,
And never was piping so gay.

BREASAL THE FISHERMAN

Although you hide in the ebb and flow
Of the pale tide when the moon has set,
The people of coming days will know
About the casting out of my net,
And how you have leaped times out of mind
Over the little silver cords,
And think that you were hard and unkind,
And blame you with many bitter words.

A CRADLE SONG

The Danann children laugh, in cradles of wrought gold,
And clap their hands together, and half close their eyes,
For they will ride the North when the ger-eagle flies,
With heavy whitening wings, and a heart fallen cold:
I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,
And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me.
Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea;
Desolate winds that hover in the flaming West;
Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and beat
The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering ghost;
O heart the winds have shaken; the unappeasable host
Is comelier than candles before Maurya's feet.

INTO THE TWILIGHT

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
Laugh heart again in the gray twilight,
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,
Dew ever shining and twilight gray;
Though hope fall from you and love decay,
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:
For there the mystical brotherhood
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood
And river and stream work out their will;
And God stands winding His lonely horn,
And time and the world are ever in flight;
And love is less kind than the gray twilight,
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

THE SONG OF THE OLD MOTHER

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;
And the young lie long and dream in their bed
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,
And their day goes over in idleness,
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:
While I must work because I am old,
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

THE FIDDLER OF DOONEY

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,
My brother in Moharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:
They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time,
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on the three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With ‘Here is the fiddler of Dooney!’
And dance like a wave of the sea.

THE HEART OF THE WOMAN

O what to me the little room
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;
He bade me out into the gloom,
And my breast lies upon his breast.

O what to me my mother’s care,
The house where I was safe and warm;
The shadowy blossom of my hair
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

O hiding hair and dewy eyes,
I am no more with life and death,
My heart upon his warm heart lies,
My breath is mixed into his breath.

AEDH LAMENTS THE LOSS OF LOVE

Pale brows, still hands and dim hair,
I had a beautiful friend
And dreamed that the old despair
Would end in love in the end:
She looked in my heart one day
And saw your image was there;
She has gone weeping away.

MONGAN LAMENTS THE CHANGE THAT HAS COME UPON HIM AND HIS BELOVED

Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns!
I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;
I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of Thorns,
For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and fear
Under my feet that they follow you night and day.
A man with a hazel wand came without sound;
He changed me suddenly; I was looking another way;
And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;
And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.
I would that the boar without bristles had come from the West
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.

MICHAEL ROBARTES BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE

I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,
Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering white;
The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,
The East her hidden joy before the morning break,
The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,
The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire:
O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay:
Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous feet.

HANRAHAN REPROVES THE CURLEW

O, curlew, cry no more in the air,
Or only to the waters in the West;
Because your crying brings to my mind
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
That was shaken out over my breast:
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

MICHAEL ROBARTES REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY

When my arms wrap you round I press
My heart upon the loveliness
That has long faded from the world;
The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled
In shadowy pools, when armies fled;
The love-tales wove with silken thread
By dreaming ladies upon cloth
That has made fat the murderous moth;
The roses that of old time were
Woven by ladies in their hair,
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
Through many a sacred corridor
Where such gray clouds of incense rose
That only the gods' eyes did not close:
For that pale breast and lingering hand
Come from a more dream-heavy land,
A more dream-heavy hour than this;
And when you sigh from kiss to kiss
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,
For hours when all must fade like dew
But flame on flame, deep under deep,
Throne over throne, where in half sleep
Their swords upon their iron knees
Brood her high lonely mysteries.

A POET TO HIS BELOVED

I bring you with reverent hands
The books of my numberless dreams;
White woman that passion has worn
As the tide wears the dove-gray sands,
And with heart more old than the horn
That is brimmed from the pale fire of time:
White woman with numberless dreams
I bring you my passionate rhyme.

AEDH GIVES HIS BELOVED CERTAIN RHYMES

Fasten your hair with a golden pin,
And bind up every wandering tress;
I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:
It worked at them, day out, day in,
Building a sorrowful loveliness
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,
And bind up your long hair and sigh;
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;
And candle-like foam on the dim sand,
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,
Live but to light your passing feet.

TO MY HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE NO FEAR

Be you still, be you still, trembling heart;
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:
Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,
And the winds that blow through the starry ways,
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood
Cover over and hide, for he has no part
With the proud, majestical multitude.

THE CAP AND BELLS

The jester walked in the garden:
The garden had fallen still;
He bade his soul rise upward
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,
When owls began to call:
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming,
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air.

‘I have cap and bells,’ he pondered,
‘I will send them to her and die;’
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,
Under a cloud of her hair,
And her red lips sang them a love song:
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,
And the heart and the soul came through,
To her right hand came the red one,
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,
A chattering wise and sweet,
And her hair was a folded flower
And the quiet of love in her feet.

THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK PIG

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
We who still labour by the cromlec on the shore,
The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,
Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you
Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.

MICHAEL ROBARTES ASKS FORGIVENESS BECAUSE OF HIS MANY MOODS

If this importunate heart trouble your peace
With words lighter than air,
Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and cease;
Crumple the rose in your hair;
And cover your lips with odorous twilight and say,
‘O Hearts of wind-blown flame!
‘O Winds, elder than changing of night and day,
‘That murmuring and longing came,
‘From marble cities loud with tabors of old
‘In dove-gray faery lands;
‘From battle banners fold upon purple fold,
‘Queens wrought with glimmering hands;
‘That saw young Niamh hover with love-lorn face
‘Above the wandering tide;
‘And lingered in the hidden desolate place,
‘Where the last Phoenix died
‘And wrapped the flames above his holy head;
‘And still murmur and long:
‘O Piteous Hearts, changing till change be dead
‘In a tumultuous song:’
And cover the pale blossoms of your breast
With your dim heavy hair,
And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest
The odorous twilight there.

AEDH TELLS OF A VALLEY FULL OF LOVERS

I dreamed that I stood in a valley, and amid sighs,
For happy lovers passed two by two where I stood;
And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily out of the wood
With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes:
I cried in my dream '*O women bid the young men lay*
'Their heads on your knees, and drown their eyes with your hair,
'Or remembering hers they will find no other face fair
'Till all the valleys of the world have been withered away.'

AEDH TELLS OF THE PERFECT BEAUTY

O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes
The poets labouring all their days
To build a perfect beauty in rhyme
Are overthrown by a woman’s gaze
And by the unlabouring brood of the skies:
And therefore my heart will bow, when dew
Is dropping sleep, until God burn time,
Before the unlabouring stars and you.

AEDH HEARS THE CRY OF THE SEDGE

I wander by the edge
Of this desolate lake
Where wind cries in the sedge
Until the axle break
That keeps the stars in their round
And hands hurl in the deep
The banners of East and West
And the girdle of light is unbound,
Your breast will not lie by the breast
Of your beloved in sleep.

AEDH THINKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE SPOKEN EVIL OF HIS BELOVED

Half close your eyelids, loosen your hair,
And dream about the great and their pride;
They have spoken against you everywhere,
But weigh this song with the great and their pride;
I made it out of a mouthful of air,
Their children’s children shall say they have lied.

THE BLESSED

Cumhal called out, bending his head,
Till Dathi came and stood,
With a blink in his eyes at the cave mouth,
Between the wind and the wood.

And Cumhal said, bending his knees,
‘I have come by the windy way
‘To gather the half of your blessedness
‘And learn to pray when you pray.

‘I can bring you salmon out of the streams
‘And heron out of the skies.’
But Dathi folded his hands and smiled
With the secrets of God in his eyes.

And Cumhal saw like a drifting smoke
All manner of blessed souls,
Women and children, young men with books,
And old men with croziers and stoles.

‘Praise God and God’s mother,’ Dathi said,
‘For God and God’s mother have sent
‘The blessedest souls that walk in the world
‘To fill your heart with content.’

‘And which is the blessedest,’ Cumhal said,
‘Where all are comely and good?
‘Is it these that with golden thuribles
‘Are singing about the wood?’

‘My eyes are blinking,’ Dathi said,
‘With the secrets of God half blind,
‘But I can see where the wind goes
‘And follow the way of the wind;

‘And blessedness goes where the wind goes,
‘And when it is gone we are dead;
‘I see the blessedest soul in the world
‘And he nods a drunken head.

‘O blessedness comes in the night and the day
‘And whither the wise heart knows;
‘And one has seen in the redness of wine
‘The Incorruptible Rose,

‘That drowsily drops faint leaves on him
‘And the sweetness of desire,
‘While time and the world are ebbing away
‘In twilights of dew and of fire.’

THE SECRET ROSE

Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose,
Enfold me in my hour of hours; where those
Who sought thee in the Holy Sepulchre,
Or in the wine vat, dwell beyond the stir
And tumult of defeated dreams; and deep
Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep
Men have named beauty. Thy great leaves enfold
The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and gold
Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose eyes
Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of elder rise
In druid vapour and make the torches dim;
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him
Who met Fand walking among flaming dew
By a gray shore where the wind never blew,
And lost the world and Emer for a kiss;
And him who drove the gods out of their liss,
And till a hundred morns had flowered red,
Feasted and wept the barrows of his dead;
And the proud dreaming king who flung the crown
And sorrow away, and calling bard and clown
Dwelt among wine-stained wanderers in deep woods;
And him who sold tillage, and house, and goods,
And sought through lands and islands numberless years,
Until he found with laughter and with tears,
A woman, of so shining loveliness,
That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,
A little stolen tress. I, too, await

The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?

HANRAHAN LAMENTS BECAUSE OF HIS WANDERINGS

O where is our Mother of Peace
Nodding her purple hood?
For the winds that awakened the stars
Are blowing through my blood.
I would that the death-pale deer
Had come through the mountain side,
And trampled the mountain away,
And drunk up the murmuring tide;
For the winds that awakened the stars
Are blowing through my blood,
And our Mother of Peace has forgot me
Under her purple hood.

THE TRAVAIL OF PASSION

When the flaming lute-thronged angelic door is wide;
When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay;
Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the way
Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side,
The hyssop-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kidron stream:
We will bend down and loosen our hair over you,
That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew,
Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.

THE POET PLEADS WITH HIS FRIEND FOR OLD FRIENDS

Though you are in your shining days,
Voices among the crowd
And new friends busy with your praise,
Be not unkind or proud,
But think about old friends the most:
Time’s bitter flood will rise,
Your beauty perish and be lost
For all eyes but these eyes.

HANRAHAN SPEAKS TO THE LOVERS OF HIS SONGS IN COMING DAYS

O, colleens, kneeling by your altar rails long hence,
When songs I wove for my beloved hide the prayer,
And smoke from this dead heart drifts through the violet air
And covers away the smoke of myrrh and frankincense;
Bend down and pray for the great sin I wove in song,
Till Maurya of the wounded heart cry a sweet cry,
And call to my beloved and me: ‘No longer fly
‘Amid the hovering, piteous, penitential throng.’

AEDH PLEADS WITH THE ELEMENTAL POWERS

The Powers whose name and shape no living creature knows
Have pulled the Immortal Rose;
And though the Seven Lights bowed in their dance and wept,
The Polar Dragon slept,
His heavy rings uncoiled from glimmering deep to deep:
When will he wake from sleep?

Great Powers of falling wave and wind and windy fire,
With your harmonious choir
Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,
That my old care may cease;
Unfold your flaming wings and cover out of sight
The nets of day and night.

Dim Powers of drowsy thought, let her no longer be
Like the pale cup of the sea,
When winds have gathered and sun and moon burned dim
Above its cloudy rim;
But let a gentle silence wrought with music flow
Whither her footsteps go.

AEDH WISHES HIS BELOVED WERE DEAD

Were you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;
And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead:
Nor would you rise and hasten away,
Though you have the will of the wild birds,
But know your hair was bound and wound
About the stars and moon and sun:
O would beloved that you lay
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,
While lights were paling one by one.

AEDH WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

MONGAN THINKS OF HIS PAST GREATNESS

I have drunk ale from the Country of the Young
And weep because I know all things now:
I have been a hazel tree and they hung
The Pilot Star and the Crooked Plough
Among my leaves in times out of mind:
I became a rush that horses tread:
I became a man, a hater of the wind,
Knowing one, out of all things, alone, that his head
Would not lie on the breast or his lips on the hair
Of the woman that he loves, until he dies;
Although the rushes and the fowl of the air
Cry of his love with their pitiful cries.

Poems from ‘The Shadowy Waters’

CONTENTS

TO LADY GREGORY
THE HARP OF AENGUS

Please note: *The Shadowy Waters* is placed in the plays section of the eBook.

TO LADY GREGORY

I walked among the seven woods of Coole:
Shan-walla, where a willow-hordered pond
Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;
Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-no,
Where many hundred squirrels are as happy
As though they had been hidden hy green houghs
Where old age cannot find them; Paire-na-lee,
Where hazel and ash and privet hlind the paths:
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;
Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes
Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;
Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox
And marten-cat, and borders that old wood
Wise Buddy Early called the wicked wood:
Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.
I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,
Yet dreamed that beings happier than men
Moved round me in the shadows, and at night
My dreams were clown hy voices and by fires;
And the images I have woven in this story
Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters
Moved round me in the voices and the fires,
And more I may not write of, for they that cleave
The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue
Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.
How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud shadows?

I only know that all we know comes from you,
And that you come from Eden on flying feet.
Is Eden far away, or do you hide
From human thought, as hares and mice and coneys
That run before the reaping-hook and lie
In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods
And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?
Is Eden out of time and out of space?
And do you gather about us when pale light
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of feathers
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?
I have made this poem for you, that men may read it
Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,
As men in the old times, before the harps began,
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.

THE HARP OF AENGUS

Edain came out of Midhir's hill, and lay
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds
And Druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples made
Of opal and ruhy and pale chrysolite
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,
Because her hands had been made wild by love.
When Midhir's wife had changed her to a fly,
He made a harp with Druid apple-wood
That she among her winds might know he wept;
And from that hour he has watched over none
But faithful lovers.

Two Narrative Poems

CONTENTS

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE
BAILE AND AILLINN

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE

A certain poet in outlandish clothes
Gathered a crowd in some Byzantine lane,
Talked1 of his country and its people, sang
To some stringed instrument none there had seen,
A wall behind his back, over his head
A latticed window. His glance went up at time
As though one listened there, and his voice sank
Or let its meaning mix into the strings.

MAEVE the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone,
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But Soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great-bodied and great-limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;

And she'd had lucky eyes and high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.
O unquiet heart,
Why do you praise another, praising her,
As if there were no tale but your own tale
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen
Who has been buried some two thousand years?
When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour'
Shook the ale-horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;
And wondering who of the many-changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall, being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate.
The porter slept, although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise
Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs

More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull and the Brown Bull.
She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,
Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping-room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished, Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.
Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice
Of those that, it may be, can never age.
He said, 'High Queen of Cruachan and Magh Ai,
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you.'
And with glad voice Maeve answered him, 'What king
Of the far-wandering shadows has come to me,
As in the old days when they would come and go

About my threshold to counsel and to help?'
The parted lips replied, 'I seek your help,
For I am Aengus, and I am crossed in love.'
'How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that wander with hand clasping hand,
Their haughty images that cannot wither,
For all their beauty's like a hollow dream,
Mirrored in streams that neither hail nor rain
Nor the cold North has troubled?'
He replied,
'I am from those rivers and I bid you call
The children of the Maines out of sleep,
And set them digging under Bual's hill.
We shadows, while they uproot his earthy housc,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue-eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls,
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan.'
'I obey your will
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck.'
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,

Came to the threshold of the painted house
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.
She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day
To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.
The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror-stricken faces,
Till Maeve called out, 'These are but common men.
The Maines' children have not dropped their spades
Because Earth, crazy for its broken power,
Casts up a Show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows.' Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
Till it died out where an old thorn-tree stood.
Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone,
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you;

And when I've heard how they grew old and died,
Or fell into unhappiness, I've said,
'She will grow old and die, and she has wept!'
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.
I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one,
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings,
Said, 'Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace.'
Then Maeve: 'O Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high ralk
With the first kings of many-pillared Cruachan.
O when will you grow weary?'
They had vanished,
But our of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

BAILE AND AILLINN

ARGUMENT.

Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to he happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.

I HARDLY hear the curlew cry,

Nor thegrey rush when the wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Uladh, Buan's son,
Baile, who had the honey mouth;
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaidh's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their hodies had grown old.
Being forbid to marry on earth,
They blossomed to immortal mirth.

About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band
Of harpers and young men; and they
Imagined, as they struck the way

To many-pastured Muirthemne,
That all things fell out happily,
And there, for all that fools had said,
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.
They found an old man running there:
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
He had puddle-water in his shoes;
He had half a cloak to keep him dry,
Although he had a squirrel's eye.

wandering hirds and rushy beds,
You put such folly in our heads
With all this crying in the wind,
No common love is to our mind,
And our poor kate or Nan is less
Than any whose unhappiness
Awoke the harp-strings long ago.
Yet they that know all things hut know
That all this life can give us is
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.
Who was it put so great a scorn
In thegrey reeds that night and morn
Are trodden and broken hy the herds,
And in the light bodies of birds
The north wind tumbles to and fro
And pinches among hail and snow?
That runner said: 'I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,

To tell him how the girl Aillinn
Rode from the country of her kin,
And old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With: ''You must home again, and wed
With somebody in your own land.''
A young man cried and kissed her hand,
''O lady, wed with one of us'';
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake,
She fell and died of the heart-break.'
Because a lover's heart s worn out,
Being tumbled and blown about
By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he, being laid upon green boughs,
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Uladh sat before
The brazen pillars of his door,
His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend

For athough years had passed away
He always wept them on that day,
For on that day they had been betrayed;
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
Under a cairn of sleepy stone
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
Although he is carrying stone, but two
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

We hold, because our memory is
Sofull of that thing and of this,
That out of sight is out of mind.
But the grey rush under the wind
And the grey bird with crooked bill
rave such long memories that they still
Remember Deirdre and her man;
And when we walk with Kate or Nan
About the windy water-side,
Our hearts can Fear the voices chide.
How could we be so soon content,
Who know the way that Naoise went?
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,
Who being lovely was so wise —
Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
Gathering his cloak about him, mn
Where Aillinn rode with waiting-maids,
Who amid leafy lights and shades

Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
Their bodices in some dim place
When they had come to the matriage-bed,
And harpers, pacing with high head
As though their music were enough
To make the savage heart of love
Grow gentle without sorrowing,
Imagining and pondering
Heaven knows what calamity;
‘Another’s hurried off,’ cried he,
‘From heat and cold and wind and wave;
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne, and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ —
Baile, that was of Rury’s seed.
But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting-maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn’s marriage-bed,
For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes.’
Then seeing that he scarce had spoke
Before her love-worn heart had broke.
He ran and laughed until he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Laighen, because
Some god or king had made the laws

That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.
That old man climbed; the day grew dim;
Two swans came flying up to him,
Linked by a gold chain each to each,
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.
They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp-strings
That Edain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.
What shall I call them? fish that swim,
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water-lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing-place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,
Or the door-pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple-boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran.
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end,
Because they have made so good a friend.

They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias,
And Findrias and Falias,
And long-forgotten Murias,
Among the giant kings whose hoard,
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword,
Was robbed before earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is,
And tremble with their love and kiss.
They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.
What were our praise to them? They eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat;
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat,
Far out under a windless sky;
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow,
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.
And poets found, old writers say,

A yew tree where his body lay;
But a wild apple hid the grass
With its sweet blossom where hers was,
And being in good heart, because
A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,
And that long fighting at the ford,
They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.

Let rush and hird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her.
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she,
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two; for never yet
Has lover lived, but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive.

In the Seven Woods

This collection of poems was first published in 1903 by the poet's sister Elizabeth Yeats. Critics now class the anthology as being the first book of Yeats' 'middle period', in which he laid aside his previous Romantic ideals in preference for pre-Raphaelite imagery. The poems also exhibit a more spare style, with an anti-romantic poetic approach.

The Dun Emer Press with Elizabeth Yeats working the hand press, 1903

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THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES IN THE WATER.
UNDER THE MOON.
THE PLAYERS ASK FOR A BLESSING ON THE PSALTERIES AND THEMSELVES.
THE RIDER FROM THE NORTH.

Yeats, 1903

IN THE SEVEN WOODS.

I have heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
Hum in the lime tree flowers; and put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart. I have forgot awhile
Tara uprooted, and new commonness
Upon the throne and crying about the streets
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
Because it is alone of all things happy.
I am contented for I know that Quiet
Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great Archer,
Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs
A cloudy quiver over Parc-na-Lee.
August, 1902.

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE.

Maeve the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.
O unquiet heart,
Why do you praise another, praising her,
As if there were no tale but your own tale
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen

Who has been buried some two thousand years?
When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;
And wondering who of the many changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate.
The porter slept although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise
Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs
More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.
She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,
Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh

Lifted the curtain of her sleeping room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.
Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice
Of those that it may be can never age.
He said, 'High Queen of Cruachan and Mag Ai
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you.'
And with glad voice Maeve answered him, 'What King
Of the far wandering shadows has come to me?
As in the old days when they would come and go
About my threshold to counsel and to help.'
The parted lips replied, 'I seek your help,
For I am Aengus and I am crossed in love.'
'How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that wander with hand clasping hand
By rivers where nor rain nor hail has dimmed
Their haughty images, that cannot fade
Although their beauty's like a hollow dream.'
'I come from the undimmed rivers to bid you call

The children of the Maines out of sleep,
And set them digging into Anbual's hill.
We shadows, while they uproot his earthy house,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan.'
'I obey your will
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck.'
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,
Came to the threshold of the painted house,
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.
She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day
To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air

Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.
The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror strucken faces,
Till Maeve called out, 'These are but common men.
The Maines' children have not dropped their spades
Because Earth crazy for its broken power
Casts up a show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows.' Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.
Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you,
And when I've heard how they grew old and died
Or fell into unhappiness I've said;
'She will grow old and die and she has wept!'
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.
I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings

Said, ‘Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve’s household, owing all
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace.’
Then Maeve, ‘O Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high talk
With the first kings of many pillared Cruachan.
O when will you grow weary.’
They had vanished,
But out of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

BAILE AND AILLINN.

Argument. Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.

I hardly hear the curlew cry,
Nor the grey rush when wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,
Baile who had the honey mouth,
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their bodies had grown old;
Being forbid to marry on earth
They blossomed to immortal mirth.
About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band
Of harpers and young men, and they
Imagined, as they struck the way
To many pastured Muirthemne,

That all things fell out happily
And there, for all that fools had said,
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.
They found an old man running there,
He had ragged long grass-yellow hair;
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
He had puddle water in his shoes;
He had half a cloak to keep him dry;
Although he had a squirrel's eye.
O wandering birds and rushy beds
You put such folly in our heads
With all this crying in the wind
No common love is to our mind,
And our poor Kate or Nan is less
Than any whose unhappiness
Awoke the harp strings long ago.
Yet they that know all things but know
That all life had to give us is
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.
Who was it put so great a scorn
In the grey reeds that night and morn
Are trodden and broken by the herds,
And in the light bodies of birds
That north wind tumbles to and fro
And pinches among hail and snow?
That runner said, 'I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth
To tell him how the girl Aillinn

Rode from the country of her kin
And old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With "You must home again and wed
With somebody in your own land."
A young man cried and kissed her hand
"O lady, wed with one of us;"
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake
She fell and died of the heart-break.'
Because a lover's heart's worn out
Being tumbled and blown about
By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he being laid upon green boughs
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Ulad sat before
The brazen pillars of his door;
His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend;
For although years had passed away

He always wept them on that day,
For on that day they had been betrayed;
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
Under a cairn of sleepy stone
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
Although he is carrying stone, but two
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.
We hold because our memory is
So full of that thing and of this
That out of sight is out of mind.
But the grey rush under the wind
And the grey bird with crooked bill
Have such long memories that they still
Remember Deirdre and her man,
And when we walk with Kate or Nan
About the windy water side
Our heart can hear the voices chide.
How could we be so soon content
Who know the way that Naoise went?
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes
Who being lovely was so wise,
Ah wise, my heart knows well how wise.
Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
Gathering his cloak about him, run
Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids
Who amid leafy lights and shades
Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
Their bodices in some dim place

When they had come to the marriage bed;
And harpers pondering with bowed head
A music that had thought enough
Of the ebb of all things to make love
Grow gentle without sorrowings;
And leather-coated men with slings
Who peered about on every side;
And amid leafy light he cried,
‘He is well out of wind and wave,
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ
Baile that was of Rury’s seed.
But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn’s marriage bed,
For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes.’
And hurrying to the south he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because
Some god or king had made the laws
That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.
That old man climbed; the day grew dim;
Two swans came flying up to him

Linked by a gold chain each to each
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.
They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp strings
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.
What shall I call them? fish that swim
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water-lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or it may be, the eyelids of one eye
Or the door pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran;
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end
Because they have made so good a friend.
They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias
And Findrias and Falias
And long-forgotten Murias,

Among the giant kings whose hoard
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword
Was robbed before Earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is
And tremble with their love and kiss.
They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.
What were our praise to them: they eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat,
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat
Far out under a windless sky,
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.
And poets found, old writers say,
A yew tree where his body lay,
But a wild apple hid the grass
With its sweet blossom where hers was;
And being in good heart, because

A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,
And that long fighting at the ford,
They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.
Let rush and bird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two, for never yet
Has lover lived but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive.

THE ARROW.

I thought of your beauty and this arrow
Made out of a wild thought is in my marrow.
There’s no man may look upon her, no man,
As when newly grown to be a woman,
Blossom pale, she pulled down the pale blossom
At the moth hour and hid it in her bosom.
This beauty’s kinder yet for a reason
I could weep that the old is out of season.

THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED.

One that is ever kind said yesterday:
‘Your well beloved’s hair has threads of grey
And little shadows come about her eyes;
Time can but make it easier to be wise
Though now it’s hard, till trouble is at an end;
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend.’
But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain.
Time can but make her beauty over again
Because of that great nobleness of hers;
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs
Burns but more clearly; O she had not these ways
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.
O heart, O heart, if she’d but turn her head,
You’d know the folly of being comforted.

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS.

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds,
‘Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
For the roads are unending and there is no place to my mind.’
The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill
And I fell asleep upon lonely Echtge of streams;
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.
I know of the leafy paths that the witches take,
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles of wool,
And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
And of apple islands where the Danaan kind
Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows cool
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams;
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.
I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
Coupled with golden chains and sing as they fly,
A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound
Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so blind
With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone by;
I know, and the curlew and peewit on Echtge of streams;
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind,
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

ADAM'S CURSE.

We sat together at one summer's end
That beautiful mild woman your close friend
And you and I, and talked of poetry.
I said 'a line will take us hours maybe,
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.'
That woman then
Murmured with her young voice, for whose mild sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
In finding that it's young and mild and low.
'There is one thing that all we women know
Although we never heard of it at school,
That we must labour to be beautiful.'
I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;

Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.’
We sat grown quiet at the name of love.
We saw the last embers of daylight die
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time’s waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.
I had a thought for no one’s but your ears;
That you were beautiful and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we’d grown
As weary hearted as that hollow moon.

THE SONG OF RED HANRAHAN.

The old brown thorn trees break in two high over Cummen Strand
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand,
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies;
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
Of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan.
The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve can say.
Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat;
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet
Of Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan.
The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-Bare,
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
Is Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan.

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES IN THE WATER.

I heard the old, old men say
‘Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away.’
They had hands like claws, and their knees
Were twisted like the old thorn trees
By the waters.
I heard the old, old men say
‘All that’s beautiful drifts away
Like the waters.’

UNDER THE MOON.

I have no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde;
Nor Avalon the grass green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,
Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a while,
Nor Ulad when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind,
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart,
Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and the sun's
Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long lived ones,
Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates apart,
And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn
To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier:
Therein are many queens like Branwen, and Guinivere;
And Niam, and Laban, and Fand, who could change to an otter or fawn
And the wood-woman whose lover was changed to a blue-eyed hawk;
And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun, or shore,
Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,
I hear the harp string praise them or hear their mournful talk.
Because of a story I heard under the thin horn
Of the third moon, that hung between the night and the day,
To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

THE PLAYERS ASK FOR A BLESSING ON THE PSALTERIES AND THEMSELVES.

Three Voices together
Hurry to bless the hands that play,
The mouths that speak, the notes and strings,
O masters of the glittering town!
O! lay the shrilly trumpet down,
Though drunken with the flags that sway
Over the ramparts and the towers,
And with the waving of your wings.
First Voice
Maybe they linger by the way;
One gathers up his purple gown;
One leans and mutters by the wall;
He dreads the weight of mortal hours.
Second Voice
O no, O no, they hurry down
Like plovers that have heard the call.
Third Voice
O, kinsmen of the Three in One,
O, kinsmen bless the hands that play.
The notes they waken shall live on
When all this heavy history's done.
Our hands, our hands must ebb away.
Three Voices together
The proud and careless notes live on
But bless our hands that ebb away.

THE RIDER FROM THE NORTH.

From the play of The Country of the Young.

There's many a strong farmer
Whose heart would break in two
If he could see the townland
That we are riding to;
Boughs have their fruit and blossom,
At all times of the year,
Rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer.
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a golden and silver wood,
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,
Are dancing in a crowd.
The little fox he murmured,
'O what is the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane.'
When their hearts are so high,
That they would come to blows,
They unhook their heavy swords
From golden and silver boughs;
But all that are killed in battle
Awaken to life again;

It is lucky that their story
Is not known among men.
For O the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie,
For their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry.
The little fox he murmured,
‘O what is the world’s bane?’
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
‘O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world’s bane.’
Michael will unhook his trumpet
From a bough overhead,
And blow a little noise
When the supper has been spread.
Gabriel will come from the water
With a fish tail, and talk
Of wonders that have happened
On wet roads where men walk,
And lift up an old horn
Of hammered silver, and drink
Till he has fallen asleep
Upon the starry brink.
The little fox he murmured,
‘O what is the world’s bane?’

The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
‘O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland,
That is the world’s bane.’

I made some of these poems walking about among the Seven Woods, before the big wind of nineteen hundred and three blew down so many trees, & troubled the wild creatures, & changed the look of things; and I thought out there a good part of the play which follows. The first shape of it came to me in a dream, but it changed much in the making, foreshadowing, it may be, a change that may bring a less dream-burdened will into my verses. I never re-wrote anything so many times; for at first I could not make these wills that stream into mere life poetical. But now I hope to do easily much more of the kind, and that our new Irish players will find the buskin and the sock.

The Green Helmet and Other Poems

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THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG

HIS DREAM

I swayed upon the gaudy stern
The butt end of a steering oar,
And everywhere that I could turn
Men ran upon the shore.
And though I would have hushed the crowd
There was no mother's son but said,
"What is the figure in a shroud
Upon a gaudy bed?"
And fishes bubbling to the brim
Cried out upon that thing beneath,
It had such dignity of limb,
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I'd my finger on my lip,
What could I but take up the song?
And fish and crowd and gaudy ship
Cried out the whole night long,
Crying amid the glittering sea,
Naming it with ecstatic breath,
Because it had such dignity
By the sweet name of Death.

A WOMAN HOMER SUNG

If any man drew near
When I was young,
I thought, “He holds her dear,”
And shook with hate and fear.
But oh, ‘twas bitter wrong
If he could pass her by
With an indifferent eye.
Whereon I wrote and wrought,
And now, being gray,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
That coming time can say,
“He shadowed in a glass
What thing her body was.”

For she had fiery blood
When I was young,
And trod so sweetly proud
As ‘twere upon a cloud,
A woman Homer sung,
That life and letters seem
But an heroic dream.

THAT THE NIGHT COME

She lived in storm and strife.
Her soul had such desire
For what proud death may bring
That it could not endure
The common good of life,
But lived as ‘twere a king
That packed his marriage day
With banneret and pennon,
Trumpet and kettledrum,
And the outrageous cannon,
To bundle Time away
That the night come.

THE CONSOLATION

I had this thought awhile ago,
“My darling cannot understand
What I have done, or what would do
In this blind bitter land.”
And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain;
That every year I have cried, “At length
My darling understands it all,
Because I have come into my strength,
And words obey my call.”

That had she done so who can say
What would have shaken from the sieve?
I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live.

FRIENDS

Now must I these three praise —
Three women that have wrought
What joy is in my days;
One that no passing thought,
Nor those unpassing cares,
No, not in these fifteen
Many times troubled years,
Could ever come between
Heart and delighted heart;
And one because her hand
Had strength that could unbind
What none can understand,
What none can have and thrive,
Youth's dreamy load, till she

So changed me that I live
Labouring in ecstasy.
And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
With scarce a pitying look?
How should I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,
What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root

So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.

NO SECOND TROY

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

RECONCILIATION

Some may have blamed you that you took away
The verses that could move them on the day
When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes blind
With lightning you went from me, and I could find
Nothing to make a song about but kings,
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things
That were like memories of you — but now
We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;

And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,
Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.
But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,
My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

KING AND NO KING

“Would it were anything but merely voice!”
The No King cried who after that was King,
Because he had not heard of anything
That balanced with a word is more than noise;
Yet Old Romance being kind, let him prevail
Somewhere or somehow that I have forgot,
Though he’d but cannon — Whereas we that had thought
To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale

Have been defeated by that pledge you gave
In momentary anger long ago;
And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We’ll find so good a thing as that we have lost?
The hourly kindness, the day’s common speech,
The habitual content of each with each
When neither soul nor body has been crossed.

THE COLD HEAVEN

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook delighting Heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild, that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,

Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken,
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

PEACE

Ah, that Time could touch a form
That could show what Homer's age
Bred to be a hero's wage.
"Were not all her life but storm,
Would not painters paint a form
Of such noble lines" I said.
"Such a delicate high head,
So much sternness and such charm,
Till they had changed us to like strength?"
Ah, but peace that comes at length,
Came when Time had touched her form.

AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE

O heart, be at peace, because
Nor knave nor dolt can break
What's not for their applause,
Being for a woman's sake.
Enough if the work has seemed,
So did she your strength renew,
A dream that a lion had dreamed
Till the wilderness cried aloud,
A secret between you two,
Between the proud and the proud.
What, still you would have their praise!
But here's a haughtier text,
The labyrinth of her days
That her own strangeness perplexed;

And how what her dreaming gave
Earned slander, ingratitude,
From self-same dolt and knave;
Aye, and worse wrong than these.
Yet she, singing upon her road,
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

THE FASCINATION OF WHAT'S DIFFICULT

The fascination of what's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart. There's something ails our colt
That must, as if it had not holy blood,
Nor on an Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt
As though it dragged road metal. My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,

On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before the dawn comes round again
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

A DRINKING SONG

Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That’s all we shall know for truth
Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh.

THE COMING OF WISDOM WITH TIME

Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth.

ON HEARING THAT THE STUDENTS OF OUR NEW UNIVERSITY HAVE JOINED THE ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS AND THE AGITATION AGAINST IMMORAL LITERATURE

Where, where but here have Pride and Truth,
That long to give themselves for wage,
To shake their wicked sides at youth
Restraining reckless middle-age.

TO A POET, WHO WOULD HAVE ME PRAISE CERTAIN BAD POETS, IMITATORS OF HIS AND MINE

You say, as I have often given tongue
In praise of what another's said or sung,
'Twere politic to do the like by these;
But where's the wild dog that has praised his fleas?

THE ATTACK ON THE “PLAY BOY”

Once, when midnight smote the air,
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
Round about Hell’s gate, to stare
At great Juan riding by,
And like these to rail and sweat,
Maddened by that sinewy thigh.

A LYRIC FROM AN UNPUBLISHED PLAY

“Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.”
“O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold.”
“I would but find what’s there to find,
Love or deceit.”
“It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what’s behind.”
“But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire.”
“O no, my dear, let all that be,
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me?”

UPON A HOUSE SHAKEN BY THE LAND AGITATION

How should the world be luckier if this house,
Where passion and precision have been one
Time out of mind, became too ruinous
To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun?
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
Where wings have memory of wings, and all
That comes of the best knit to the best? Although
Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its fall,

How should their luck run high enough to reach
The gifts that govern men, and after these
To gradual Time's last gift, a written speech
Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease?

AT THE ABBEY THEATRE

Imitated from Ronsard

Dear Craoibhin Aoibhin, look into our case.
When we are high and airy hundreds say
That if we hold that flight they'll leave the place,
While those same hundreds mock another day
Because we have made our art of common things,
So bitterly, you'd dream they longed to look
All their lives through into some drift of wings.

You've dandled them and fed them from the book
And know them to the bone; impart to us —
We'll keep the secret — a new trick to please.
Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty seas?
Or is there none, most popular of men,
But when they mock us that we mock again?

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye;
The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie.
And therefore, friend, if your great race were run
And these things came, so much the more thereby
Have you made greatness your companion,
Although it be for children that you sigh:
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

AT GALWAY RACES

Out yonder, where the race course is,
Delight makes all of the one mind,
Riders upon the swift horses,
The field that closes in behind:
We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.
Sing on: sometime, and at some new moon,
We'll learn that sleeping is not death,
Hearing the whole earth change its tune,
Its flesh being wild, and it again
Crying aloud as the race course is,
And we find hearteners among men
That ride upon horses.

A FRIEND'S ILLNESS

Sickness brought me this
Thought, in that scale of his:
Why should I be dismayed
Though flame had burned the whole
World, as it were a coal,
Now I have seen it weighed
Against a soul?

ALL THINGS CAN TEMPT ME

All things can tempt me from this craft of verse:
One time it was a woman's face, or worse —
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land;
Now nothing but comes readier to the hand
Than this accustomed toil. When I was young,
I had not given a penny for a song
Did not the poet sing it with such airs
That one believed he had a sword upstairs;

Yet would be now, could I but have my wish,
Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish.

THE YOUNG MAN'S SONG

I whispered, "I am too young,"
And then, "I am old enough,"
Wherefore I threw a penny
To find out if I might love;
"Go and love, go and love, young man,
If the lady be young and fair,"
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
I am looped in the loops of her hair.
Oh love is the crooked thing,
There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away,
And the shadows eaten the moon;
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
One cannot begin it too soon.

Responsibilities

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INTRODUCTORY RHYMES

Pardon, old fathers, if you still remain
Somewhere in ear-shot for the story's end,
Old Dublin merchant 'free of ten and four'
Or trading out of Galway into Spain;
And country scholar, Robert Emmet's friend,
A hundred-year-old memory to the poor;
Traders or soldiers who have left me blood
That has not passed through any huxter's loin,
Pardon, and you that did not weigh the cost,
Old Butlers when you took to horse and stood
Beside the brackish waters of the Boyne
Till your bad master blenched and all was lost;
You merchant skipper that leaped overboard
After a ragged hat in Biscay Bay,
You most of all, silent and fierce old man
Because you were the spectacle that stirred
My fancy, and set my boyish lips to say
'Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun';
Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.
January 1914.

THE GREY ROCK

Poets with whom I learned my trade,
Companions of the Cheshire Cheese,
Here's an old story I've re-made,
Imagining 'twould better please
Your ears than stories now in fashion,
Though you may think I waste my breath
Pretending that there can be passion
That has more life in it than death,
And though at bottling of your wine
The bow-legged Goban had no say;
The moral's yours because it's mine.
When cups went round at close of day —
Is not that how good stories run? —
Somewhere within some hollow hill,
If books speak truth in Slievenamon,
But let that be, the gods were still
And sleepy, having had their meal,
And smoky torches made a glare
On painted pillars, on a deal
Of fiddles and of flutes hung there
By the ancient holy hands that brought them
From murmuring Murias, on cups —
Old Goban hammered them and wrought them,
And put his pattern round their tops
To hold the wine they buy of him.
But from the juice that made them wise
All those had lifted up the dim

Imaginations of their eyes,
For one that was like woman made
Before their sleepy eyelids ran
And trembling with her passion said,
‘Come out and dig for a dead man,
Who’s burrowing somewhere in the ground,
And mock him to his face and then
Hollo him on with horse and hound,
For he is the worst of all dead men.’
We should be dazed and terror struck,
If we but saw in dreams that room,
Those wine-drenched eyes, and curse our luck
That emptied all our days to come.
I knew a woman none could please,
Because she dreamed when but a child
Of men and women made like these;
And after, when her blood ran wild,
Had ravelled her own story out,
And said, ‘In two or in three years
I need must marry some poor lout,’
And having said it burst in tears.
Since, tavern comrades, you have died,
Maybe your images have stood,
Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,
Before that roomful or as good.
You had to face your ends when young —
‘Twas wine or women, or some curse —
But never made a poorer song

That you might have a heavier purse,
Nor gave loud service to a cause
That you might have a troop of friends.
You kept the Muses' sterner laws,
And unrepenting faced your ends,
And therefore earned the right — and yet
Dowson and Johnson most I praise —
To troop with those the world's forgot,
And copy their proud steady gaze.
'The Danish troop was driven out
Between the dawn and dusk,' she said;
'Although the event was long in doubt,
Although the King of Ireland's dead
And half the kings, before sundown
All was accomplished.'
'When this day
Murrough, the King of Ireland's son,
Foot after foot was giving way,
He and his best troops back to back
Had perished there, but the Danes ran,
Stricken with panic from the attack,
The shouting of an unseen man;
And being thankful Murrough found,
Led by a footsole dipped in blood
That had made prints upon the ground,
Where by old thorn trees that man stood;
And though when he gazed here and there,
He had but gazed on thorn trees, spoke,

“Who is the friend that seems but air
And yet could give so fine a stroke?”
Thereon a young man met his eye,
Who said, “Because she held me in
Her love, and would not have me die,
Rock-nurtured Aoife took a pin,
And pushing it into my shirt,
Promised that for a pin’s sake,
No man should see to do me hurt;
But there it’s gone; I will not take
The fortune that had been my shame
Seeing, King’s son, what wounds you have.”
‘Twas roundly spoke, but when night came
He had betrayed me to his grave,
For he and the King’s son were dead.
I’d promised him two hundred years,
And when for all I’d done or said —
And these immortal eyes shed tears —
He claimed his country’s need was most,
I’d save his life, yet for the sake
Of a new friend he has turned a ghost.
What does he care if my heart break?
I call for spade and horse and hound
That we may harry him.’ Thereon
She cast herself upon the ground
And rent her clothes and made her moan:
‘Why are they faithless when their might
Is from the holy shades that rove

The grey rock and the windy light?
Why should the faithfullest heart most love
The bitter sweetness of false faces?
Why must the lasting love what passes,
Why are the gods by men betrayed!'
But thereon every god stood up
With a slow smile and without sound,
And stretching forth his arm and cup
To where she moaned upon the ground,
Suddenly drenched her to the skin;
And she with Goban's wine adrip,
No more remembering what had been,
Stared at the gods with laughing lip.
I have kept my faith, though faith was tried,
To that rock-born, rock-wandering foot,
And the world's altered since you died,
And I am in no good repute
With the loud host before the sea,
That think sword strokes were better meant
Than lover's music — let that be,
So that the wandering foot's content.

THE TWO KINGS

King Eochaid came at sundown to a wood
Westward of Tara. Hurrying to his queen
He had out-ridden his war-wasted men
That with empounded cattle trod the mire;
And where beech trees had mixed a pale green light
With the ground-ivy's blue, he saw a stag
Whiter than curds, its eyes the tint of the sea.
Because it stood upon his path and seemed
More hands in height than any stag in the world
He sat with tightened rein and loosened mouth
Upon his trembling horse, then drove the spur;
But the stag stooped and ran at him, and passed,
Rending the horse's flank. King Eochaid reeled
Then drew his sword to hold its levelled point
Against the stag. When horn and steel were met
The horn resounded as though it had been silver,
A sweet, miraculous, terrifying sound.
Horn locked in sword, they tugged and struggled there
As though a stag and unicorn were met
In Africa on Mountain of the Moon,
Until at last the double horns, drawn backward,
Butted below the single and so pierced
The entrails of the horse. Dropping his sword
King Eochaid seized the horns in his strong hands
And stared into the sea-green eye, and so
Hither and thither to and fro they trod
Till all the place was beaten into mire.

The strong thigh and the agile thigh were met,
The hands that gathered up the might of the world,
And hoof and horn that had sucked in their speed
Amid the elaborate wilderness of the air.
Through bush they plunged and over ivied root,
And where the stone struck fire, while in the leaves
A squirrel whinnied and a bird screamed out;
But when at last he forced those sinewy flanks
Against a beech bole, he threw down the beast
And knelt above it with drawn knife. On the instant
It vanished like a shadow, and a cry
So mournful that it seemed the cry of one
Who had lost some unimaginable treasure
Wandered between the blue and the green leaf
And climbed into the air, crumbling away,
Till all had seemed a shadow or a vision
But for the trodden mire, the pool of blood,
The disembowelled horse.
King Eochaid ran,
Toward peopled Tara, nor stood to draw his breath
Until he came before the painted wall,
The posts of polished yew, circled with bronze,
Of the great door; but though the hanging lamps
Showed their faint light through the unshuttered windows,
Nor door, nor mouth, nor slipper made a noise,
Nor on the ancient beaten paths, that wound
From well-side or from plough-land, was there noise;
And there had been no sound of living thing

Before him or behind, but that far-off
On the horizon edge bellowed the herds.
Knowing that silence brings no good to kings,
And mocks returning victory, he passed
Between the pillars with a beating heart
And saw where in the midst of the great hall
Pale-faced, alone upon a bench, Edain
Sat upright with a sword before her feet.
Her hands on either side had gripped the bench,
Her eyes were cold and steady, her lips tight.
Some passion had made her stone. Hearing a foot
She started and then knew whose foot it was;
But when he thought to take her in his arms
She motioned him afar, and rose and spoke:
'I have sent among the fields or to the woods
The fighting men and servants of this house,
For I would have your judgment upon one
Who is self-accused. If she be innocent
She would not look in any known man's face
Till judgment has been given, and if guilty,
Will never look again on known man's face.'
And at these words he paled, as she had paled,
Knowing that he should find upon her lips
The meaning of that monstrous day.
Then she:
'You brought me where your brother Ardan sat
Always in his one seat, and bid me care him
Through that strange illness that had fixed him there,

And should he die to heap his burial mound
And carve his name in Ogham.' Eochaid said,
'He lives?' 'He lives and is a healthy man.'
'While I have him and you it matters little
What man you have lost, what evil you have found.'
'I bid them make his bed under this roof
And carried him his food with my own hands,
And so the weeks passed by. But when I said
"What is this trouble?" he would answer nothing,
Though always at my words his trouble grew;
And I but asked the more, till he cried out,
Weary of many questions: "There are things
That make the heart akin to the dumb stone."
Then I replied: "Although you hide a secret,
Hopeless and dear, or terrible to think on,
Speak it, that I may send through the wide world
For medicine." Thereon he cried aloud:
"Day after day you question me, and I,
Because there is such a storm amid my thoughts
I shall be carried in the gust, command,
Forbid, beseech and waste my breath." Then I,
"Although the thing that you have hid were evil,
The speaking of it could be no great wrong,
And evil must it be, if done 'twere worse
Than mound and stone that keep all virtue in,
And loosen on us dreams that waste our life,
Shadows and shows that can but turn the brain."
But finding him still silent I stooped down

And whispering that none but he should hear,
Said: “If a woman has put this on you,
My men, whether it please her or displease,
And though they have to cross the Loughlan waters
And take her in the middle of armed men,
Shall make her look upon her handiwork,
That she may quench the rick she has fired; and though
She may have worn silk clothes, or worn a crown,
She’ll not be proud, knowing within her heart
That our sufficient portion of the world
Is that we give, although it be brief giving,
Happiness to children and to men.”
Then he, driven by his thought beyond his thought,
And speaking what he would not though he would,
Sighed: “You, even you yourself, could work the cure!”
And at those words I rose and I went out
And for nine days he had food from other hands,
And for nine days my mind went whirling round
The one disastrous zodiac, muttering
That the immedicable mound’s beyond
Our questioning, beyond our pity even.
But when nine days had gone I stood again
Before his chair and bending down my head
Told him, that when Orion rose, and all
The women of his household were asleep,
To go — for hope would give his limbs the power —
To an old empty woodman’s house that’s hidden
Close to a clump of beech trees in the wood

Westward of Tara, there to await a friend
That could, as he had told her, work his cure
And would be no harsh friend.
When night had deepened,
I groped my way through boughs, and over roots,
Till oak and hazel ceased and beech began,
And found the house, a sputtering torch within,
And stretched out sleeping on a pile of skins
Ardan, and though I called to him and tried
To shake him out of sleep, I could not rouse him.
I waited till the night was on the turn,
Then fearing that some labourer, on his way
To plough or pasture-land, might see me there,
Went out.
Among the ivy-covered rocks,
As on the blue light of a sword, a man
Who had unnatural majesty, and eyes
Like the eyes of some great kite scouring the woods,
Stood on my path. Trembling from head to foot
I gazed at him like grouse upon a kite;
But with a voice that had unnatural music,
“A weary wooing and a long,” he said,
“Speaking of love through other lips and looking
Under the eyelids of another, for it was my craft
That put a passion in the sleeper there,
And when I had got my will and drawn you here,
Where I may speak to you alone, my craft
Sucked up the passion out of him again

And left mere sleep. He'll wake when the sun wakes,
Push out his vigorous limbs and rub his eyes,
And wonder what has ailed him these twelve months."
I cowered back upon the wall in terror,
But that sweet-sounding voice ran on: "Woman,
I was your husband when you rode the air,
Danced in the whirling foam and in the dust,
In days you have not kept in memory,
Being betrayed into a cradle, and I come
That I may claim you as my wife again."
I was no longer terrified, his voice
Had half awakened some old memory,
Yet answered him: "I am King Eochaid's wife
And with him have found every happiness
Women can find." With a most masterful voice,
That made the body seem as it were a string
Under a bow, he cried: "What happiness
Can lovers have that know their happiness
Must end at the dumb stone? But where we build
Our sudden palaces in the still air
Pleasure itself can bring no weariness,
Nor can time waste the cheek, nor is there foot
That has grown weary of the whirling dance,
Nor an unlaughing mouth, but mine that mourns,
Among those mouths that sing their sweethearts' praise,
Your empty bed." "How should I love," I answered,
"Were it not that when the dawn has lit my bed
And shown my husband sleeping there, I have sighed,

‘Your strength and nobleness will pass away.’
Or how should love be worth its pains were it not
That when he has fallen asleep within my arms,
Being wearied out, I love in man the child?
What can they know of love that do not know
She builds her nest upon a narrow ledge
Above a windy precipice?” Then he:
“Seeing that when you come to the death-bed
You must return, whether you would or no,
This human life blotted from memory,
Why must I live some thirty, forty years,
Alone with all this useless happiness?”
Thereon he seized me in his arms, but I
Thrust him away with both my hands and cried,
“Never will I believe there is any change
Can blot out of my memory this life
Sweetened by death, but if I could believe
That were a double hunger in my lips
For what is doubly brief.”
And now the shape,
My hands were pressed to, vanished suddenly.
I staggered, but a beech tree stayed my fall,
And clinging to it I could hear the cocks
Crow upon Tara.’
King Eochaid bowed his head
And thanked her for her kindness to his brother,
For that she promised, and for that refused.
Thereon the bellowing of the empounded herds

Rose round the walls, and through the bronze-ringed door
Jostled and shouted those war-wasted men,
And in the midst King Eochaid’s brother stood.
He’d heard that din on the horizon’s edge
And ridden towards it, being ignorant.

TO A WEALTHY MAN WHO PROMISED A SECOND SUBSCRIPTION TO THE DUBLIN MUNICIPAL GALLERY IF IT WERE PROVED THE PEOPLE WANTED PICTURES

You gave but will not give again
Until enough of Paudeen's pence
By Biddy's halfpennies have lain
To be 'some sort of evidence,'
Before you'll put your guineas down,
That things it were a pride to give
Are what the blind and ignorant town
Imagines best to make it thrive.
What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
His mummers to the market place,
What th' onion-sellers thought or did
So that his Plautus set the pace
For the Italian comedies?
And Guidobaldo, when he made
That grammar school of courtesies
Where wit and beauty learned their trade
Upon Urbino's windy hill,
Had sent no runners to and fro
That he might learn the shepherds' will.
And when they drove out Cosimo,
Indifferent how the rancour ran,
He gave the hours they had set free
To Michelozzo's latest plan

For the San Marco Library,
Whence turbulent Italy should draw
Delight in Art whose end is peace,
In logic and in natural law
By sucking at the dugs of Greece.
Your open hand but shows our loss,
For he knew better how to live.
Let Paudeens play at pitch and toss,
Look up in the sun's eye and give
What the exultant heart calls good
That some new day may breed the best
Because you gave, not what they would
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!
December 1912.

SEPTEMBER 1913

What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone;
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.
Yet they were of a different kind
The names that stilled your childish play,
They have gone about the world like wind,
But little time had they to pray
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,
And what, God help us, could they save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.
Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave;
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.
Yet could we turn the years again,
And call those exiles as they were,
In all their loneliness and pain

You’d cry ‘some woman’s yellow hair
Has maddened every mother’s son’:
They weighed so lightly what they gave,
But let them be, they’re dead and gone,
They’re with O’Leary in the grave.

TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK HAS COME TO NOTHING

Now all the truth is out,
Be secret and take defeat
From any brazen throat,
For how can you compete,
Being honour bred, with one
Who, were it proved he lies,
Were neither shamed in his own
Nor in his neighbours' eyes?
Bred to a harder thing
Than Triumph, turn away
And like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone,
Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.

PAUDEEN

Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
Among the stones and thorn trees, under morning light;
Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
A single soul that lacks a sweet crystaline cry.

TO A SHADE

If you have revisited the town, thin Shade,
Whether to look upon your monument
(I wonder if the builder has been paid)
Or happier thoughted when the day is spent
To drink of that salt breath out of the sea
When grey gulls flit about instead of men,
And the gaunt houses put on majesty:
Let these content you and be gone again;
For they are at their old tricks yet.
A man
Of your own passionate serving kind who had brought
In his full hands what, had they only known,
Had given their children's children loftier thought,
Sweeter emotion, working in their veins
Like gentle blood, has been driven from the place,
And insult heaped upon him for his pains
And for his open-handedness, disgrace;
An old foul mouth that slandered you had set
The pack upon him.
Go, unquiet wanderer,
And gather the Glasnevin coverlet
About your head till the dust stops your ear,
The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come;
You had enough of sorrow before death —
Away, away! You are safer in the tomb.

September 29th, 1914.

WHEN HELEN LIVED

We have cried in our despair
That men desert,
For some trivial affair
Or noisy, insolent sport,
Beauty that we have won
From bitterest hours;
Yet we, had we walked within
Those topless towers
Where Helen walked with her boy,
Had given but as the rest
Of the men and women of Troy,
A word and a jest.

THE ATTACK ON ‘THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD,’ 1907

Once, when midnight smote the air,
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
From thoroughfare to thoroughfare,
While that great Juan galloped by;
And like these to rail and sweat
Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

THE THREE BEGGARS

'Though to my feathers in the wet,
I have stood here from break of day,
I have not found a thing to eat
For only rubbish comes my way.
Am I to live on lebeen-lone?'
Muttered the old crane of Gort.
'For all my pains on lebeen-lone.'
King Guari walked amid his court
The palace-yard and river-side
And there to three old beggars said:
'You that have wandered far and wide
Can ravel out what's in my head.
Do men who least desire get most,
Or get the most who most desire?'
A beggar said: 'They get the most
Whom man or devil cannot tire,
And what could make their muscles taut
Unless desire had made them so.'
But Guari laughed with secret thought,
'If that be true as it seems true,
One of you three is a rich man,
For he shall have a thousand pounds
Who is first asleep, if but he can
Sleep before the third noon sounds.'
And thereon merry as a bird,
With his old thoughts King Guari went
From river-side and palace-yard

And left them to their argument.
‘And if I win,’ one beggar said,
‘Though I am old I shall persuade
A pretty girl to share my bed’;
The second: ‘I shall learn a trade’;
The third: ‘I’ll hurry to the course
Among the other gentlemen,
And lay it all upon a horse’;
The second: ‘I have thought again:
A farmer has more dignity.’
One to another sighed and cried:
The exorbitant dreams of beggary,
That idleness had borne to pride,
Sang through their teeth from noon to noon;
And when the second twilight brought
The frenzy of the beggars’ moon
They closed their blood-shot eyes for naught.
One beggar cried: ‘You’re shamming sleep.’
And thereupon their anger grew
Till they were whirling in a heap.
They’d mauled and bitten the night through
Or sat upon their heels to rail,
And when old Guari came and stood
Before the three to end this tale,
They were commingling lice and blood.
‘Time’s up,’ he cried, and all the three
With blood-shot eyes upon him stared.
‘Time’s up,’ he cried, and all the three

Fell down upon the dust and snored.
‘Maybe I shall be lucky yet,
Now they are silent,’ said the crane.
‘Though to my feathers in the wet
I’ve stood as I were made of stone
And seen the rubbish run about,
It’s certain there are trout somewhere
And maybe I shall take a trout
If but I do not seem to care.’

THE THREE HERMITS

Three old hermits took the air
By a cold and desolate sea,
First was muttering a prayer,
Second rummaged for a flea;
On a windy stone, the third,
Giddy with his hundredth year,
Sang unnoticed like a bird.
‘Though the Door of Death is near
And what waits behind the door,
Three times in a single day
I, though upright on the shore,
Fall asleep when I should pray.’
So the first but now the second,
‘We’re but given what we have earned
When all thoughts and deeds are reckoned,
So it’s plain to be discerned
That the shades of holy men,
Who have failed being weak of will,
Pass the Door of Birth again,
And are plagued by crowds, until
They’ve the passion to escape.’
Moaned the other, ‘They are thrown
Into some most fearful shape.’
But the second mocked his moan:
‘They are not changed to anything,
Having loved God once, but maybe,
To a poet or a king

Or a witty lovely lady.’
While he’d rummaged rags and hair,
Caught and cracked his flea, the third,
Giddy with his hundredth year
Sang unnoticed like a bird.

BEGGAR TO BEGGAR CRIED

‘Time to put off the world and go somewhere
And find my health again in the sea air,’
Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,
‘And make my soul before my pate is bare.’
‘And get a comfortable wife and house
To rid me of the devil in my shoes,’
Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,
‘And the worse devil that is between my thighs.’
‘And though I’d marry with a comely lass,
She need not be too comely — let it pass,’
Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,
‘But there’s a devil in a looking-glass.’
‘Nor should she be too rich, because the rich
Are driven by wealth as beggars by the itch,’
Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,
‘And cannot have a humorous happy speech.’
‘And there I’ll grow respected at my ease,
And hear amid the garden’s nightly peace,’
Beggar to beggar cried, being frenzy-struck,
‘The wind-blown clamor of the barnacle-geese.’

THE WELL AND THE TREE

‘The Man that I praise,’
Cries out the empty well,
‘Lives all his days
Where a hand on the bell
Can call the milch-cows
To the comfortable door of his house.
Who but an idiot would praise
Dry stones in a well?’
‘The Man that I praise,’
Cries out the leafless tree,
‘Has married and stays
By an old hearth, and he
On naught has set store
But children and dogs on the floor.
Who but an idiot would praise
A withered tree?’

RUNNING TO PARADISE

As I came over Windy Gap
They threw a halfpenny into my cap,
For I am running to Paradise;
And all that I need do is to wish
And somebody puts his hand in the dish
To throw me a bit of salted fish:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.
My brother Mourteen is worn out
With skelping his big brawling lout,
And I am running to Paradise;
A poor life do what he can,
And though he keep a dog and a gun,
A serving maid and a serving man:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.
Poor men have grown to be rich men,
And rich men grown to be poor again,
And I am running to Paradise;
And many a darling wit's grown dull
That tossed a bare heel when at school,
Now it has filled an old sock full:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.
The wind is old and still at play
While I must hurry upon my way,
For I am running to Paradise;
Yet never have I lit on a friend
To take my fancy like the wind

That nobody can buy or bind:
And there the king *is* but as the beggar.

THE HOUR BEFORE DAWN

A one-legged, one-armed, one-eyed man,
A bundle of rags upon a crutch,
Stumbled on windy Cruachan
Cursing the wind. It was as much
As the one sturdy leg could do
To keep him upright while he cursed.
He had counted, where long years ago
Queen Maeve's nine Maines had been nursed,
A pair of lapwings, one old sheep
And not a house to the plain's edge,
When close to his right hand a heap
Of grey stones and a rocky ledge
Reminded him that he could make,
If he but shifted a few stones,
A shelter till the daylight broke.
But while he fumbled with the stones
They toppled over; 'Were it not
I have a lucky wooden shin
I had been hurt'; and toppling brought
Before his eyes, where stones had been,
A dark deep hole in the rock's face.
He gave a gasp and thought to run,
Being certain it was no right place
But the Hell Mouth at Cruachan
That's stuffed with all that's old and bad,
And yet stood still, because inside
He had seen a red-haired jolly lad

In some outlandish coat beside
A ladle and a tub of beer,
Plainly no phantom by his look.
So with a laugh at his own fear
He crawled into that pleasant nook.
Young Red-head stretched himself to yawn
And murmured, ‘May God curse the night
That’s grown uneasy near the dawn
So that it seems even I sleep light;
And who are you that wakens me?
Has one of Maeve’s nine brawling sons
Grown tired of his own company?
But let him keep his grave for once
I have to find the sleep I have lost.’
And then at last being wide awake,
‘I took you for a brawling ghost,
Say what you please, but from day-break
I’ll sleep another century.’
The beggar deaf to all but hope
Went down upon a hand and knee
And took the wooden ladle up
And would have dipped it in the beer
But the other pushed his hand aside,
‘Before you have dipped it in the beer
That sacred Goban brewed,’ he cried,
‘I’d have assurance that you are able
To value beer — I will have no fool
Dipping his nose into my ladle

Because he has stumbled on this hole
In the bad hour before the dawn.
If you but drink that beer and say
I will sleep until the winter's gone,
Or maybe, to Midsummer Day
You will sleep that length; and at the first
I waited so for that or this —
Because the weather was a-cursed
Or I had no woman there to kiss,
And slept for half a year or so;
But year by year I found that less
Gave me such pleasure I'd forgo
Even a half hour's nothingness,
And when at one year's end I found
I had not waked a single minute,
I chose this burrow under ground.
I will sleep away all Time within it:
My sleep were now nine centuries
But for those mornings when I find
The lapwing at their foolish cries
And the sheep bleating at the wind
As when I also played the fool.'
The beggar in a rage began
Upon his hunkers in the hole,
'It's plain that you are no right man
To mock at everything I love
As if it were not worth the doing.
I'd have a merry life enough

If a good Easter wind were blowing,
And though the winter wind is bad
I should not be too down in the mouth
For anything you did or said
If but this wind were in the south.'
But the other cried, 'You long for spring
Or that the wind would shift a point
And do not know that you would bring,
If time were suppler in the joint,
Neither the spring nor the south wind
But the hour when you shall pass away
And leave no smoking wick behind,
For all life longs for the Last Day
And there's no man but cocks his ear
To know when Michael's trumpet cries
That flesh and bone may disappear,
And souls as if they were but sighs,
And there be nothing but God left;
But I alone being blessed keep
Like some old rabbit to my cleft
And wait Him in a drunken sleep.'
He dipped his ladle in the tub
And drank and yawned and stretched him out.
The other shouted, 'You would rob
My life of every pleasant thought
And every comfortable thing
And so take that and that.' Thereon
He gave him a great pummelling,

But might have pummelled at a stone
For all the sleeper knew or cared;
And after heaped the stones again
And cursed and prayed, and prayed and cursed:
‘Oh God if he got loose!’ And then
In fury and in panic fled
From the Hell Mouth at Cruachan
And gave God thanks that overhead
The clouds were brightening with the dawn.

THE PLAYER QUEEN

Song from an Unfinished Play

My mother dandled me and sang,
‘How young it is, how young!’
And made a golden cradle
That on a willow swung.
‘He went away,’ my mother sang,
‘When I was brought to bed,’
And all the while her needle pulled
The gold and silver thread.
She pulled the thread and bit the thread
And made a golden gown,
And wept because she had dreamt that I
Was born to wear a crown.
‘When she was got,’ my mother sang,
‘I heard a sea-mew cry,
And saw a flake of the yellow foam
That dropped upon my thigh.’
How therefore could she help but braid
The gold into my hair,
And dream that I should carry
The golden top of care?

THE REALISTS

Hope that you may understand!
What can books of men that wive
In a dragon-guarded land,
Paintings of the dolphin-drawn
Sea-nymphs in their pearly waggons
Do, but awake a hope to live
That had gone
With the dragons?

I

THE WITCH

Toil, and grow rich,
What's that but to lie
With a foul witch
And after, drained dry,
To be brought
To the chamber where
Lies one long sought
With despair.

II

THE PEACOCK

What’s riches to him
That has made a great peacock
With the pride of his eye?
The wind-beaten, stone-grey,
And desolate Three-rock
Would nourish his whim.
Live he or die
Amid wet rocks and heather,
His ghost will be gay
Adding feather to feather
For the pride of his eye.

THE MOUNTAIN TOMB

Pour wine and dance if Manhood still have pride,
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;
The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.
Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet
That there be no foot silent in the room
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet;
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.
In vain, in vain; the cataract still cries
The everlasting taper lights the gloom;
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND

I

Dance there upon the shore;
What need have you to care
For wind or water's roar?
And tumble out your hair
That the salt drops have wet;
Being young you have not known
The fool's triumph, nor yet
Love lost as soon as won,
Nor the best labourer dead
And all the sheaves to bind.
What need have you to dread
The monstrous crying of wind?

II

Has no one said those daring
Kind eyes should be more learn'd?
Or warned you how despairing
The moths are when they are burned,
I could have warned you, but you are young,
So we speak a different tongue.
O you will take whatever's offered
And dream that all the world's a friend,
Suffer as your mother suffered,
Be as broken in the end.

But I am old and you are young,
And I speak a barbarous tongue.

A MEMORY OF YOUTH

The moments passed as at a play,
I had the wisdom love brings forth;
I had my share of mother wit
And yet for all that I could say,
And though I had her praise for it,
A cloud blown from the cut-throat north
Suddenly hid love's moon away.
Believing every word I said
I praised her body and her mind
Till pride had made her eyes grow bright,
And pleasure made her cheeks grow red,
And vanity her footfall light,
Yet we, for all that praise, could find
Nothing but darkness overhead.
We sat as silent as a stone,
We knew, though she'd not said a word,
That even the best of love must die,
And had been savagely undone
Were it not that love upon the cry
Of a most ridiculous little bird
Tore from the clouds his marvellous moon.

FALLEN MAJESTY

Although crowds gathered once if she but showed her face,
And even old men’s eyes grew dim, this hand alone,
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping place,
Babbling of fallen majesty, records what’s gone.
The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,
These, these remain, but I record what’s gone. A crowd
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.

FRIENDS

Now must I these three praise —
Three women that have wrought
What joy is in my days;
One that no passing thought,
Nor those unpassing cares,
No, not in these fifteen
Many times troubled years,
Could ever come between
Heart and delighted heart;
And one because her hand
Had strength that could unbind
What none can understand,
What none can have and thrive,
Youth's dreamy load, till she
So changed me that I live
Labouring in ecstasy.
And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
With scarce a pitying look?
How should I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,
What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root

So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.

THE COLD HEAVEN

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting Heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken,
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

THAT THE NIGHT COME

She lived in storm and strife,
Her soul had such desire
For what proud death may bring
That it could not endure
The common good of life,
But lived as ‘twere a king
That packed his marriage day
With banneret and pennon,
Trumpet and kettledrum,
And the outrageous cannon,
To bundle time away
That the night come.

AN APPOINTMENT

Being out of heart with government
I took a broken root to fling
Where the proud, wayward squirrel went,
Taking delight that he could spring;
And he, with that low whinnying sound
That is like laughter, sprang again
And so to the other tree at a bound.
Nor the tame will, nor timid brain,
Bred that fierce tooth and cleanly limb
And threw him up to laugh on the bough;
No government appointed him.

I

THE MAGI

Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

II

THE DOLLS

A doll in the doll-maker's house
Looks at the cradle and balls:
'That is an insult to us.'
But the oldest of all the dolls
Who had seen, being kept for show,
Generations of his sort,
Out-screams the whole shelf: 'Although
There's not a man can report
Evil of this place,
The man and the woman bring
Hither to our disgrace,
A noisy and filthy thing.'
Hearing him groan and stretch
The doll-maker's wife is aware
Her husband has heard the wretch,
And crouched by the arm of his chair,
She murmurs into his ear,
Head upon shoulder leant:
'My dear, my dear, oh dear,
It was an accident.'

A COAT

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eye
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

CLOSING RHYMES

While I, from that reed-throated whisperer
Who comes at need, although not now as once
A clear articulation in the air
But inwardly, surmise companions
Beyond the fling of the dull ass's hoof,
— Ben Jonson's phrase — and find when June is come
At Kyle-na-no under that ancient roof
A sterner conscience and a friendlier home,
I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs,
Those undreamt accidents that have made me
— Seeing that Fame has perished this long while
Being but a part of ancient ceremony —
Notorious, till all my priceless things
Are but a post the passing dogs defile.

The Wild Swans at Coole

First published in 1917, this collection of poems is considered to be part of Yeats' 'middle stage', which is particularly concerned with Irish nationalism and the creation of an Irish aesthetic, as well as traditional love poems. The title poem *The Wild Swans at Coole* is one of Yeats' most celebrated works. Written in a regular stanza form, with five six-line verses in iambic meter and ABCBDD rhyme scheme, the poem evokes a mournful impression. *The Wild Swans at Coole* is about Yeats' melancholic thoughts, as he nears the 'autumn' of his life and he ponders whether the joys of love, as represented by the departing swans, may avoid him completely. The poem was written when Yeats was aged 52 and still unmarried, having struggled to maintain a long-lasting relationship due to his continual infatuation with Maud Gonne, the feminist revolutionary, who repeatedly rejected his proposals of marriage.

Yeats, close to the time of publication

Maud Gonne, Yeats' life-long beloved

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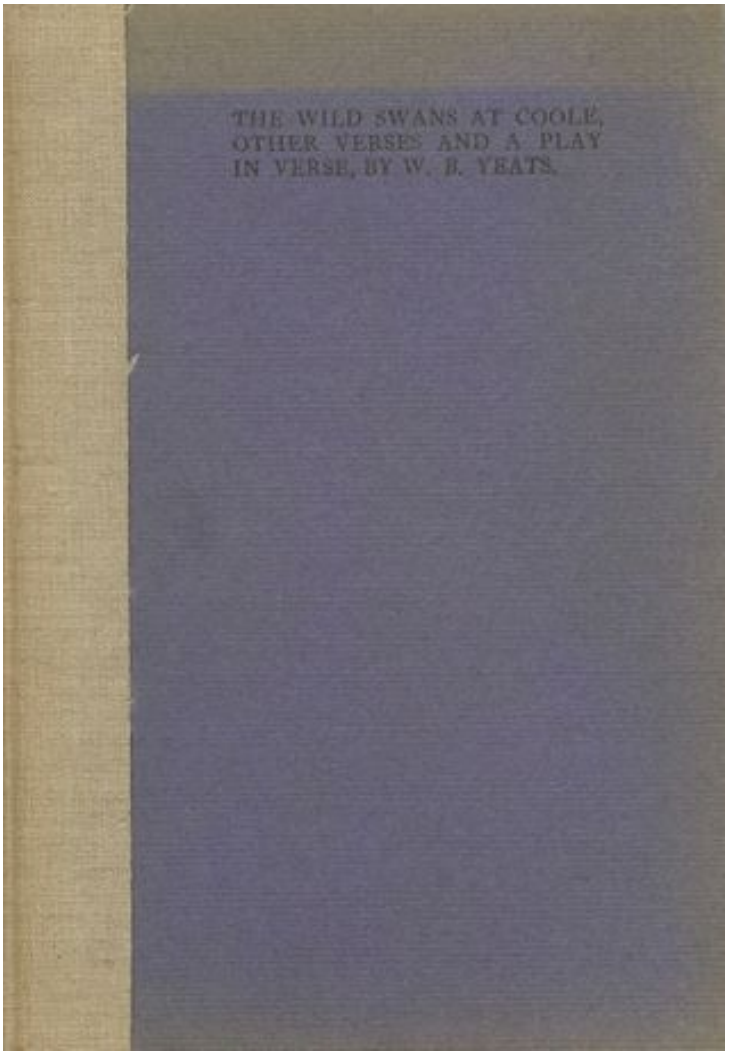


The first edition

Sunset over Coole Lough, the setting of the title poem

PREFACE

This book is, in part, a reprint of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, printed a year ago on my sister's hand-press at Dundrum, Co. Dublin. I have not, however, reprinted a play which may be a part of a book of new plays suggested by the dance plays of Japan, and I have added a number of new poems. Michael Robartes and John Aherne, whose names occur in one or other of these, are characters in some stories I wrote years ago, who have once again become a part of the phantasmagoria through which I can alone express my convictions about the world. I have the fancy that I read the name John Aherne among those of men prosecuted for making a disturbance at the first production of "The Play Boy," which may account for his animosity to myself.

W. B. Y.

BALLYLEE, CO. GALWAY,
September 1918.

THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth Autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold,
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake’s edge or pool
Delight men’s eyes, when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

IN MEMORY OF MAJOR ROBERT GREGORY

1

Now that we're almost settled in our house
I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in the ancient tower,
And having talked to some late hour
Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed:
Discoverers of forgotten truth
Or mere companions of my youth,
All, all are in my thoughts to-night, being dead.

2

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old,
And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,
And there is salt to lengthen out the smart
In the affections of our heart,
And quarrels are blown up upon that head;
But not a friend that I would bring
This night can set us quarrelling,
For all that come into my mind are dead.

3

Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,
That loved his learning better than mankind,
Though courteous to the worst; much falling he
Brooded upon sanctity
Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed

A long blast upon the horn that brought
A little nearer to his thought
A measureless consummation that he dreamed.

4

And that enquiring man John Synge comes next,
That dying chose the living world for text
And never could have rested in the tomb
But that, long travelling, he had come
Towards nightfall upon certain set apart
In a most desolate stony place,
Towards nightfall upon a race
Passionate and simple like his heart.

5

And then I think of old George Pollexfen,
In muscular youth well known to Mayo men
For horsemanship at meets or at race-courses,
That could have shown how purebred horses
And solid men, for all their passion, live
But as the outrageous stars incline
By opposition, square and trine;
Having grown sluggish and contemplative.

6

They were my close companions many a year,
A portion of my mind and life, as it were,

And now their breathless faces seem to look
Out of some old picture-book;
I am accustomed to their lack of breath,
But not that my dear friend's dear son,
Our Sidney and our perfect man,
Could share in that discourtesy of death.

7

For all things the delighted eye now sees
Were loved by him; the old storm-broken trees
That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;
The tower set on the stream's edge;
The ford where drinking cattle make a stir
Nightly, and startled by that sound
The water-hen must change her ground;
He might have been your heartiest welcomer.

8

When with the Galway foxhounds he would ride
From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side
Or Esserkelly plain, few kept his pace;
At Mooneen he had leaped a place
So perilous that half the astonished meet
Had shut their eyes, and where was it
He rode a race without a bit?
And yet his mind outran the horses' feet.

9

We dreamed that a great painter had been born
To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,
To that stern colour and that delicate line
That are our secret discipline
Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might.
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And yet he had the intensity
To have published all to be a world's delight.

10

What other could so well have counselled us
In all lovely intricacies of a house
As he that practised or that understood
All work in metal or in wood,
In moulded plaster or in carven stone?
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And all he did done perfectly
As though he had but that one trade alone.

11

Some burn damp fagots, others may consume
The entire combustible world in one small room
As though dried straw, and if we turn about
The bare chimney is gone black out
Because the work had finished in that flare.
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
As 'twere all life's epitome.
What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?

12

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind
All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved,
Or boyish intellect approved,
With some appropriate commentary on each;
Until imagination brought
A fitter welcome; but a thought
Of that late death took all my heart for speech.

AN IRISH AIRMAN FORESEES HIS DEATH

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public man, nor angry crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

MEN IMPROVE WITH THE YEARS

I am worn out with dreams;
A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams;
And all day long I look
Upon this lady's beauty
As though I had found in book
A pictured beauty,
Pleased to have filled the eyes
Or the discerning ears,
Delighted to be but wise,
For men improve with the years;
And yet and yet
Is this my dream, or the truth?
O would that we had met
When I had my burning youth;
But I grow old among dreams,
A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams.

THE COLLAR-BONE OF A HARE

Would I could cast a sail on the water
Where many a king has gone
And many a king's daughter,
And alight at the comely trees and the lawn,
The playing upon pipes and the dancing,
And learn that the best thing is
To change my loves while dancing
And pay but a kiss for a kiss.

I would find by the edge of that water
The collar-bone of a hare
Worn thin by the lapping of water,
And pierce it through with a gimlet and stare
At the old bitter world where they marry in churches,
And laugh over the untroubled water
At all who marry in churches,
Through the white thin bone of a hare.

UNDER THE ROUND TOWER

‘Although I’d lie lapped up in linen
A deal I’d sweat and little earn
If I should live as live the neighbours,’
Cried the beggar, Billy Byrne;
‘Stretch bones till the daylight come
On great-grandfather’s battered tomb.’

Upon a grey old battered tombstone
In Glendalough beside the stream,
Where the O’Byrnes and Byrnes are buried,
He stretched his bones and fell in a dream
Of sun and moon that a good hour
Bellowed and pranced in the round tower;
Of golden king and silver lady,
Bellowing up and bellowing round,
Till toes mastered a sweet measure,
Mouth mastered a sweet sound,
Prancing round and prancing up
Until they pranced upon the top.

That golden king and that wild lady
Sang till stars began to fade,
Hands gripped in hands, toes close together,
Hair spread on the wind they made;
That lady and that golden king
Could like a brace of blackbirds sing.

‘It’s certain that my luck is broken,’
That rambling jailbird Billy said;
‘Before nightfall I’ll pick a pocket
And snug it in a feather-bed,
I cannot find the peace of home
On great-grandfather’s battered tomb.’

SOLOMON TO SHEBA

Sang Solomon to Sheba,
And kissed her dusky face,
‘All day long from mid-day
We have talked in the one place,
All day long from shadowless noon
We have gone round and round
In the narrow theme of love
Like an old horse in a pound.’

To Solomon sang Sheba,
Planted on his knees,
‘If you had broached a matter
That might the learned please,
You had before the sun had thrown
Our shadows on the ground
Discovered that my thoughts, not it,
Are but a narrow pound.’

Sang Solomon to Sheba,
And kissed her Arab eyes,
‘There’s not a man or woman
Born under the skies
Dare match in learning with us two,
And all day long we have found
There’s not a thing but love can make
The world a narrow pound.’

THE LIVING BEAUTY

I'll say and maybe dream I have drawn content —
Seeing that time has frozen up the blood,
The wick of youth being burned and the oil spent —
From beauty that is cast out of a mould
In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,
Appears, and when we have gone is gone again,
Being more indifferent to our solitude
Than 'twere an apparition. O heart, we are old,
The living beauty is for younger men,
We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.

A SONG

I thought no more was needed
Youth to prolong
Than dumb-bell and foil
To keep the body young.
Oh, who could have foretold
That the heart grows old?

Though I have many words,
What woman's satisfied,
I am no longer faint
Because at her side?
Oh, who could have foretold
That the heart grows old?

I have not lost desire
But the heart that I had,
I thought 'twould burn my body
Laid on the death-bed.
But who could have foretold
That the heart grows old?

TO A YOUNG BEAUTY

Dear fellow-artist, why so free
With every sort of company,
With every Jack and Jill?
Choose your companions from the best;
Who draws a bucket with the rest
Soon topples down the hill.

You may, that mirror for a school,
Be passionate, not bountiful
As common beauties may,
Who were not born to keep in trim
With old Ezekiel's cherubim
But those of Beaujolet.

I know what wages beauty gives,
How hard a life her servant lives,
Yet praise the winters gone;
There is not a fool can call me friend,
And I may dine at journey's end
With Landor and with Donne.

TO A YOUNG GIRL

My dear, my dear, I know
More than another
What makes your heart beat so;
Not even your own mother
Can know it as I know,
Who broke my heart for her
When the wild thought,
That she denies
And has forgot,
Set all her blood astir
And glittered in her eyes.

THE SCHOLARS

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines
That young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

They'll cough in the ink to the world's end;
Wear out the carpet with their shoes
Earning respect; have no strange friend;
If they have sinned nobody knows.
Lord, what would they say
Should their Catullus walk that way?

TOM O’ROUGHLEY

‘Though logic choppers rule the town,
And every man and maid and boy
Has marked a distant object down,
An aimless joy is a pure joy,’
Or so did Tom O’Roughley say
That saw the surges running by,
‘And wisdom is a butterfly
And not a gloomy bird of prey.

‘If little planned is little sinned
But little need the grave distress.
What’s dying but a second wind?
How but in zigzag wantonness
Could trumpeter Michael be so brave?’
Or something of that sort he said,
‘And if my dearest friend were dead
I’d dance a measure on his grave.’

THE SAD SHEPHERD

SHEPHERD

That cry's from the first cuckoo of the year
I wished before it ceased.

GOATHERD

Nor bird nor beast
Could make me wish for anything this day,
Being old, but that the old alone might die,
And that would be against God's Providence.
Let the young wish. But what has brought you here?
Never until this moment have we met
Where my goats browse on the scarce grass or leap
From stone to stone.

SHEPHERD

I am looking for strayed sheep;
Something has troubled me and in my trouble
I let them stray. I thought of rhyme alone,
For rhyme can beat a measure out of trouble
And make the daylight sweet once more; but when
I had driven every rhyme into its place
The sheep had gone from theirs.

GOATHERD

I know right well
What turned so good a shepherd from his charge.

SHEPHERD

He that was best in every country sport
And every country craft, and of us all
Most courteous to slow age and hasty youth
Is dead.

GOATHERD

The boy that brings my griddle cake
Brought the bare news.

SHEPHERD

He had thrown the crook away
And died in the great war beyond the sea.

GOATHERD

He had often played his pipes among my hills
And when he played it was their loneliness,
The exultation of their stone, that cried
Under his fingers.

SHEPHERD

I had it from his mother,
And his own flock was browsing at the door.

GOATHERD

How does she bear her grief? There is not a shepherd
But grows more gentle when he speaks her name,
Remembering kindness done, and how can I,
That found when I had neither goat nor grazing
New welcome and old wisdom at her fire
Till winter blasts were gone, but speak of her
Even before his children and his wife.

SHEPHERD

She goes about her house erect and calm
Between the pantry and the linen chest,
Or else at meadow or at grazing overlooks
Her labouring men, as though her darling lived
But for her grandson now; there is no change
But such as I have seen upon her face
Watching our shepherd sports at harvest-time
When her son's turn was over.

GOATHERD

Sing your song,
I too have rhymed my reveries, but youth
Is hot to show whatever it has found
And till that's done can neither work nor wait.
Old goatherds and old goats, if in all else
Youth can excel them in accomplishment,
Are learned in waiting.

SHEPHERD

You cannot but have seen
That he alone had gathered up no gear,
Set carpenters to work on no wide table,
On no long bench nor lofty milking shed
As others will, when first they take possession,
But left the house as in his father's time
As though he knew himself, as it were, a cuckoo,
No settled man. And now that he is gone
There's nothing of him left but half a score
Of sorrowful, austere, sweet, lofty pipe tunes.

GOATHERD

You have put the thought in rhyme.

SHEPHERD

I worked all day
And when 'twas done so little had I done
That maybe 'I am sorry' in plain prose
Had sounded better to your mountain fancy.

[*He sings.*

'Like the speckled bird that steers
Thousands of leagues oversea,
And runs for a while or a while half-flies
Upon his yellow legs through our meadows,
He stayed for a while; and we

Had scarcely accustomed our ears
To his speech at the break of day,
Had scarcely accustomed our eyes
To his shape in the lengthening shadows,
Where the sheep are thrown in the pool,
When he vanished from ears and eyes.
I had wished a dear thing on that day
I heard him first, but man is a fool.'

GOATHERD

You sing as always of the natural life,
And I that made like music in my youth
Hearing it now have sighed for that young man
And certain lost companions of my own.

SHEPHERD

They say that on your barren mountain ridge
You have measured out the road that the soul treads
When it has vanished from our natural eyes;
That you have talked with apparitions.

GOATHERD

Indeed
My daily thoughts since the first stupor of youth
Have found the path my goats' feet cannot find.

SHEPHERD

Sing, for it may be that your thoughts have plucked
Some medicable herb to make our grief
Less bitter.

GOATHERD

They have brought me from that ridge
Seed pods and flowers that are not all wild poppy.

[*Sings.*

‘He grows younger every second
That were all his birthdays reckoned
Much too solemn seemed;
Because of what he had dreamed,
Or the ambitions that he served,
Much too solemn and reserved.
Jaunting, journeying
To his own dayspring,
He unpacks the loaded pern
Of all ‘twas pain or joy to learn,
Of all that he had made.
The outrageous war shall fade;
At some old winding whitethorn root
He’ll practice on the shepherd’s flute,
Or on the close-cropped grass
Court his shepherd lass,
Or run where lads reform our day-time
Till that is their long shouting play-time;
Knowledge he shall unwind

Through victories of the mind,
Till, clambering at the cradle side,
He dreams himself his mother's pride,
All knowledge lost in trance
Of sweeter ignorance.'

SHEPHERD

When I have shut these ewes and this old ram
Into the fold, we'll to the woods and there
Cut out our rhymes on strips of new-torn bark
But put no name and leave them at her door.
To know the mountain and the valley grieve
May be a quiet thought to wife and mother,
And children when they spring up shoulder high.

LINES WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

When have I last looked on
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
Of the dark leopards of the moon?
All the wild witches those most noble ladies,
For all their broom-sticks and their tears,
Their angry tears, are gone.
The holy centaurs of the hills are banished;
And I have nothing but harsh sun;
Heroic mother moon has vanished,
And now that I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun.

THE DAWN

I would be ignorant as the dawn
That has looked down
On that old queen measuring a town
With the pin of a brooch,
Or on the withered men that saw
From their pedantic Babylon
The careless planets in their courses,
The stars fade out where the moon comes,
And took their tablets and did sums;
I would be ignorant as the dawn
That merely stood, rocking the glittering coach
Above the cloudy shoulders of the horses;
I would be — for no knowledge is worth a straw —
Ignorant and wanton as the dawn.

ON WOMAN

May God be praised for woman
That gives up all her mind,
A man may find in no man
A friendship of her kind
That covers all he has brought
As with her flesh and bone,
Nor quarrels with a thought
Because it is not her own.

Though pedantry denies
It's plain the Bible means
That Solomon grew wise
While talking with his queens.
Yet never could, although
They say he counted grass,
Count all the praises due
When Sheba was his lass,
When she the iron wrought, or
When from the smithy fire
It shuddered in the water:
Harshness of their desire
That made them stretch and yawn,
Pleasure that comes with sleep,
Shudder that made them one.
What else He give or keep
God grant me — no, not here,
For I am not so bold

To hope a thing so dear
Now I am growing old,
But when if the tale's true
The Pestle of the moon
That pounds up all anew
Brings me to birth again —
To find what once I had
And know what once I have known,
Until I am driven mad,
Sleep driven from my bed,
By tenderness and care,
Pity, an aching head,
Gnashing of teeth, despair;
And all because of some one
Perverse creature of chance,
And live like Solomon
That Sheba led a dance.

THE FISHERMAN

Although I can see him still,
The freckled man who goes
To a grey place on a hill
In grey Connemara clothes
At dawn to cast his flies,
It's long since I began
To call up to the eyes
This wise and simple man.
All day I'd looked in the face
What I had hoped 'twould be
To write for my own race
And the reality;
The living men that I hate,
The dead man that I loved,
The craven man in his seat,
The insolent unreproved,
And no knave brought to book
Who has won a drunken cheer,
The witty man and his joke
Aimed at the commonest ear,
The clever man who cries
The catch-cries of the clown,
The beating down of the wise
And great Art beaten down.

Maybe a twelvemonth since
Suddenly I began,

In scorn of this audience,
Imagining a man
And his sun-freckled face,
And grey Connemara cloth,
Climbing up to a place
Where stone is dark under froth,
And the down turn of his wrist
When the flies drop in the stream:
A man who does not exist,
A man who is but a dream;
And cried, ‘Before I am old
I shall have written him one
Poem maybe as cold
And passionate as the dawn.’

THE HAWK

‘Call down the hawk from the air;
Let him be hooded or caged
Till the yellow eye has grown mild,
For larder and spit are bare,
The old cook enraged,
The scullion gone wild.’

‘I will not be clapped in a hood,
Nor a cage, nor alight upon wrist,
Now I have learnt to be proud
Hovering over the wood
In the broken mist
Or tumbling cloud.’

‘What tumbling cloud did you cleave,
Yellow-eyed hawk of the mind,
Last evening? that I, who had sat
Dumbfounded before a knave,
Should give to my friend
A pretence of wit.’

MEMORY

One had a lovely face,
And two or three had charm,
But charm and face were in vain
Because the mountain grass
Cannot but keep the form
Where the mountain hare has lain.

HER PRAISE

She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.
I have gone about the house, gone up and down
As a man does who has published a new book
Or a young girl dressed out in her new gown,
And though I have turned the talk by hook or crook
Until her praise should be the uppermost theme,
A woman spoke of some new tale she had read,
A man confusedly in a half dream
As though some other name ran in his head.
She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.
I will talk no more of books or the long war
But walk by the dry thorn until I have found
Some beggar sheltering from the wind, and there
Manage the talk until her name come round.
If there be rags enough he will know her name
And be well pleased remembering it, for in the old days,
Though she had young men’s praise and old men’s blame,
Among the poor both old and young gave her praise.

THE PEOPLE

‘What have I earned for all that work,’ I said,
‘For all that I have done at my own charge?
The daily spite of this unmannerly town,
Where who has served the most is most defamed,
The reputation of his lifetime lost
Between the night and morning. I might have lived,
And you know well how great the longing has been,
Where every day my footfall should have lit
In the green shadow of Ferrara wall;
Or climbed among the images of the past —
The unperturbed and courtly images —
Evening and morning, the steep street of Urbino
To where the duchess and her people talked
The stately midnight through until they stood
In their great window looking at the dawn;
I might have had no friend that could not mix
Courtesy and passion into one like those
That saw the wicks grow yellow in the dawn;
I might have used the one substantial right
My trade allows: chosen my company,
And chosen what scenery had pleased me best.’
Thereon my phoenix answered in reproof,
‘The drunkards, pilferers of public funds,
All the dishonest crowd I had driven away,
When my luck changed and they dared meet my face,
Crawled from obscurity, and set upon me
Those I had served and some that I had fed;

Yet never have I, now nor any time,
Complained of the people.’

All I could reply
Was: ‘You, that have not lived in thought but deed,
Can have the purity of a natural force,
But I, whose virtues are the definitions
Of the analytic mind, can neither close
The eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech.’
And yet, because my heart leaped at her words,
I was abashed, and now they come to mind
After nine years, I sink my head abashed.

HIS PHOENIX

There is a queen in China, or maybe it's in Spain,
And birthdays and holidays such praises can be heard
Of her unblemished lineaments, a whiteness with no stain,
That she might be that sprightly girl who was trodden by a bird;
And there's a score of duchesses, surpassing womankind,
Or who have found a painter to make them so for pay
And smooth out stain and blemish with the elegance of his mind:
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their day.

The young men every night applaud their Gaby's laughing eye,
And Ruth St. Denis had more charm although she had poor luck,
From nineteen hundred nine or ten, Pavlova's had the cry,
And there's a player in the States who gathers up her cloak
And flings herself out of the room when Juliet would be bride
With all a woman's passion, a child's imperious way,
And there are — but no matter if there are scores beside:
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their day.

There's Margaret and Marjorie and Dorothy and Nan,
A Daphne and a Mary who live in privacy;
One's had her fill of lovers, another's had but one,
Another boasts, 'I pick and choose and have but two or three.'
If head and limb have beauty and the instep's high and light,
They can spread out what sail they please for all I have to say,
Be but the breakers of men's hearts or engines of delight:
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their day.

There’ll be that crowd to make men wild through all the centuries,
And maybe there’ll be some young belle walk out to make men wild
Who is my beauty’s equal, though that my heart denies,
But not the exact likeness, the simplicity of a child,
And that proud look as though she had gazed into the burning sun,
And all the shapely body no tittle gone astray,
I mourn for that most lonely thing; and yet God’s will be done,
I knew a phoenix in my youth so let them have their day.

A THOUGHT FROM PROPERTIUS

She might, so noble from head
To great shapely knees,
The long flowing line,
Have walked to the altar
Through the holy images
At Pallas Athene’s side,
Or been fit spoil for a centaur
Drunk with the unmixed wine.

BROKEN DREAMS

There is grey in your hair.
Young men no longer suddenly catch their breath
When you are passing;
But maybe some old gaffer mutters a blessing
Because it was your prayer
Recovered him upon the bed of death.
For your sole sake — that all heart's ache have known,
And given to others all heart's ache,
From meagre girlhood's putting on
Burdensome beauty — for your sole sake
Heaven has put away the stroke of her doom,
So great her portion in that peace you make
By merely walking in a room.

Your beauty can but leave among us
Vague memories, nothing but memories.
A young man when the old men are done talking
Will say to an old man, 'Tell me of that lady
The poet stubborn with his passion sang us
When age might well have chilled his blood.'

Vague memories, nothing but memories,
But in the grave all, all, shall be renewed.
The certainty that I shall see that lady
Leaning or standing or walking
In the first loveliness of womanhood,
And with the fervour of my youthful eyes,
Has set me muttering like a fool.

You are more beautiful than any one
And yet your body had a flaw:
Your small hands were not beautiful,
And I am afraid that you will run
And paddle to the wrist
In that mysterious, always brimming lake
Where those that have obeyed the holy law
Paddle and are perfect; leave unchanged
The hands that I have kissed
For old sakes' sake.

The last stroke of midnight dies.
All day in the one chair
From dream to dream and rhyme to rhyme I have ranged
In rambling talk with an image of air:
Vague memories, nothing but memories.

A DEEP-SWORN VOW

Others because you did not keep
That deep-sworn vow have been friends of mine;
Yet always when I look death in the face,
When I clamber to the heights of sleep,
Or when I grow excited with wine,
Suddenly I meet your face.

PRESENCES

This night has been so strange that it seemed
As if the hair stood up on my head.
From going-down of the sun I have dreamed
That women laughing, or timid or wild,
In rustle of lace or silken stuff,
Climbed up my creaking stair. They had read
All I had rhymed of that monstrous thing
Returned and yet unrequited love.
They stood in the door and stood between
My great wood lecturn and the fire
Till I could hear their hearts beating:
One is a harlot, and one a child
That never looked upon man with desire,
And one it may be a queen.

THE BALLOON OF THE MIND

Hands, do what you’re bid;
Bring the balloon of the mind
That bellies and drags in the wind
Into its narrow shed.

TO A SQUIRREL AT KYLE-NA-GNO

Come play with me;
Why should you run
Through the shaking tree
As though I'd a gun
To strike you dead?
When all I would do
Is to scratch your head
And let you go.

ON BEING ASKED FOR A WAR POEM

I think it better that in times like these
A poet keep his mouth shut, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right;
He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
Or an old man upon a winter's night.

IN MEMORY OF ALFRED POLLEXFEN

Five-and-twenty years have gone
Since old William Pollexfen
Laid his strong bones down in death
By his wife Elizabeth
In the grey stone tomb he made.
And after twenty years they laid
In that tomb by him and her,
His son George, the astrologer;
And Masons drove from miles away
To scatter the Acacia spray
Upon a melancholy man
Who had ended where his breath began.
Many a son and daughter lies
Far from the customary skies,
The Mall and Eades's grammar school,
In London or in Liverpool;
But where is laid the sailor John?
That so many lands had known:
Quiet lands or unquiet seas
Where the Indians trade or Japanese.
He never found his rest ashore,
Moping for one voyage more.
Where have they laid the sailor John?

And yesterday the youngest son,
A humorous, unambitious man,
Was buried near the astrologer;

And are we now in the tenth year?
Since he, who had been contented long,
A nobody in a great throng,
Decided he would journey home,
Now that his fiftieth year had come,
And ‘Mr. Alfred’ be again
Upon the lips of common men
Who carried in their memory
His childhood and his family.
At all these death-beds women heard
A visionary white sea-bird
Lamenting that a man should die;
And with that cry I have raised my cry.

UPON A DYING LADY

I

HER COURTESY

With the old kindness, the old distinguished grace
She lies, her lovely piteous head amid dull red hair
Propped upon pillows, rouge on the pallor of her face.
She would not have us sad because she is lying there,
And when she meets our gaze her eyes are laughter-lit,
Her speech a wicked tale that we may vie with her
Matching our broken-hearted wit against her wit,
Thinking of saints and of Petronius Arbiter.

II

CERTAIN ARTISTS BRING HER DOLLS AND DRAWINGS

Bring where our Beauty lies
A new modelled doll, or drawing,
With a friend's or an enemy's
Features, or maybe showing
Her features when a tress
Of dull red hair was flowing
Over some silken dress
Cut in the Turkish fashion,
Or it may be like a boy's.
We have given the world our passion
We have naught for death but toys.

III

SHE TURNS THE DOLLS' FACES TO THE WALL

Because to-day is some religious festival
They had a priest say Mass, and even the Japanese,
Heel up and weight on toe, must face the wall
— Pedant in passion, learned in old courtesies,
Vehement and witty she had seemed — ; the Venetian lady
Who had seemed to glide to some intrigue in her red shoes,
Her domino, her panniered skirt copied from Longhi;
The meditative critic; all are on their toes,
Even our Beauty with her Turkish trousers on.
Because the priest must have like every dog his day
Or keep us all awake with baying at the moon,
We and our dolls being but the world were best away.

IV

THE END OF DAY

She is playing like a child
And penance is the play,
Fantastical and wild
Because the end of day
Shows her that some one soon
Will come from the house, and say —
Though play is but half-done —
‘Come in and leave the play.’ —

V

HER RACE

She has not grown uncivil
As narrow natures would
And called the pleasures evil
Happier days thought good;
She knows herself a woman
No red and white of a face,
Or rank, raised from a common
Unreckonable race;
And how should her heart fail her
Or sickness break her will
With her dead brother's valour
For an example still.

VI

HER COURAGE

When her soul flies to the predestined dancing-place
(I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made
Amid the dreams of youth) let her come face to face,
While wondering still to be a shade, with Grania's shade
All but the perils of the woodland flight forgot
That made her Dermuid dear, and some old cardinal
Pacing with half-closed eyelids in a sunny spot
Who had murmured of Giorgione at his latest breath —
Aye and Achilles, Timor, Babar, Barhaim, all
Who have lived in joy and laughed into the face of Death.

VII

HER FRIENDS BRING HER A CHRISTMAS TREE

Pardon, great enemy,
Without an angry thought
We've carried in our tree,
And here and there have bought
Till all the boughs are gay,
And she may look from the bed
On pretty things that may
Please a fantastic head.
Give her a little grace,
What if a laughing eye
Have looked into your face —
It is about to die.

EGO DOMINUS TUUS

HIC

On the grey sand beside the shallow stream
Under your old wind-beaten tower, where still
A lamp burns on beside the open book
That Michael Robartes left, you walk in the moon
And though you have passed the best of life still trace
Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion
Magical shapes.

ILLE

By the help of an image
I call to my own opposite, summon all
That I have handled least, least looked upon.

HIC

And I would find myself and not an image.

ILLE

That is our modern hope and by its light
We have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind
And lost the old nonchalance of the hand;
Whether we have chosen chisel, pen or brush
We are but critics, or but half create,
Timid, entangled, empty and abashed
Lacking the countenance of our friends.

HIC

And yet
The chief imagination of Christendom
Dante Alighieri so utterly found himself
That he has made that hollow face of his
More plain to the mind's eye than any face
But that of Christ.

ILLE

And did he find himself,
Or was the hunger that had made it hollow
A hunger for the apple on the bough
Most out of reach? and is that spectral image
The man that Lapo and that Guido knew?
I think he fashioned from his opposite
An image that might have been a stony face,
Staring upon a bedouin's horse-hair roof
From doored and windowed cliff, or half upturned
Among the coarse grass and the camel dung.
He set his chisel to the hardest stone.
Being mocked by Guido for his lecherous life,
Derided and deriding, driven out
To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread,
He found the unpersuadable justice, he found
The most exalted lady loved by a man.

HIC

Yet surely there are men who have made their art
Out of no tragic war, lovers of life,
Impulsive men that look for happiness
And sing when they have found it.

ILLE

No, not sing,
For those that love the world serve it in action,
Grow rich, popular and full of influence,
And should they paint or write still it is action:
The struggle of the fly in marmalade.
The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours,
The sentimentalist himself; while art
Is but a vision of reality.
What portion in the world can the artist have
Who has awakened from the common dream
But dissipation and despair?

HIC

And yet
No one denies to Keats love of the world;
Remember his deliberate happiness.

ILLE

His art is happy but who knows his mind?
I see a schoolboy when I think of him,
With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,

For certainly he sank into his grave
His senses and his heart unsatisfied,
And made — being poor, ailing and ignorant,
Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
The coarse-bred son of a livery stable-keeper —
Luxuriant song.

HIC

Why should you leave the lamp
Burning alone beside an open book,
And trace these characters upon the sands;
A style is found by sedentary toil
And by the imitation of great masters.

ILLE

Because I seek an image, not a book.
Those men that in their writings are most wise
Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.
I call to the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self,
And standing by these characters disclose
All that I seek; and whisper it as though
He were afraid the birds, who cry aloud
Their momentary cries before it is dawn,
Would carry it away to blasphemous men.

A PRAYER ON GOING INTO MY HOUSE

God grant a blessing on this tower and cottage
And on my heirs, if all remain unspoiled,
No table, or chair or stool not simple enough
For shepherd lads in Galilee; and grant
That I myself for portions of the year
May handle nothing and set eyes on nothing
But what the great and passionate have used
Throughout so many varying centuries.
We take it for the norm; yet should I dream
Sinbad the sailor's brought a painted chest,
Or image, from beyond the Loadstone Mountain
That dream is a norm; and should some limb of the devil
Destroy the view by cutting down an ash
That shades the road, or setting up a cottage
Planned in a government office, shorten his life,
Manacle his soul upon the Red Sea bottom.

THE PHASES OF THE MOON

An old man cocked his ear upon a bridge;
He and his friend, their faces to the South,
Had trod the uneven road. Their boots were soiled,
Their Connemara cloth worn out of shape;
They had kept a steady pace as though their beds,
Despite a dwindling and late risen moon,
Were distant. An old man cocked his ear.

AHERNE

What made that sound?

ROBARTES

A rat or water-hen
Splashed, or an otter slid into the stream.
We are on the bridge; that shadow is the tower,
And the light proves that he is reading still.
He has found, after the manner of his kind,
Mere images; chosen this place to live in
Because, it may be, of the candle light
From the far tower where Milton's platonist
Sat late, or Shelley's visionary prince:
The lonely light that Samuel Palmer engraved,
An image of mysterious wisdom won by toil;
And now he seeks in book or manuscript
What he shall never find.

AHERNE

Why should not you
Who know it all ring at his door, and speak
Just truth enough to show that his whole life
Will scarcely find for him a broken crust
Of all those truths that are your daily bread;
And when you have spoken take the roads again?

ROBARTES

He wrote of me in that extravagant style
He had learnt from Pater, and to round his tale
Said I was dead; and dead I chose to be.

AHERNE

Sing me the changes of the moon once more;
True song, though speech: ‘mine author sung it me.’

ROBARTES

Twenty-and-eight the phases of the moon,
The full and the moon’s dark and all the crescents,
Twenty-and-eight, and yet but six-and-twenty
The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in:
For there’s no human life at the full or the dark.
From the first crescent to the half, the dream
But summons to adventure and the man
Is always happy like a bird or a beast;
But while the moon is rounding towards the full
He follows whatever whim’s most difficult

Among whims not impossible, and though scarred
As with the cat-o'-nine-tails of the mind,
His body moulded from within his body
Grows comelier. Eleven pass, and then
Athenae takes Achilles by the hair,
Hector is in the dust, Nietzsche is born,
Because the heroes' crescent is the twelfth.
And yet, twice born, twice buried, grow he must,
Before the full moon, helpless as a worm.
The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war
In its own being, and when that war's begun
There is no muscle in the arm; and after
Under the frenzy of the fourteenth moon
The soul begins to tremble into stillness,
To die into the labyrinth of itself!

AHERNE

Sing out the song; sing to the end, and sing
The strange reward of all that discipline.

ROBARTES

All thought becomes an image and the soul
Becomes a body: that body and that soul
Too perfect at the full to lie in a cradle,
Too lonely for the traffic of the world:
Body and soul cast out and cast away
Beyond the visible world.

AHERNE

All dreams of the soul
End in a beautiful man's or woman's body.

ROBARTES

Have you not always known it?

AHERNE

The song will have it
That those that we have loved got their long fingers
From death, and wounds, or on Sinai's top,
Or from some bloody whip in their own hands.
They ran from cradle to cradle till at last
Their beauty dropped out of the loneliness
Of body and soul.

ROBARTES

The lovers' heart knows that.

AHERNE

It must be that the terror in their eyes
Is memory or foreknowledge of the hour
When all is fed with light and heaven is bare.

ROBARTES

When the moon's full those creatures of the full
Are met on the waste hills by country men
Who shudder and hurry by: body and soul
Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves,
Caught up in contemplation, the mind's eye
Fixed upon images that once were thought,
For separate, perfect, and immovable
Images can break the solitude
Of lovely, satisfied, indifferent eyes.

And thereupon with aged, high-pitched voice
Aherne laughed, thinking of the man within,
His sleepless candle and laborious pen.

ROBARTES

And after that the crumbling of the moon.
The soul remembering its loneliness
Shudders in many cradles; all is changed,
It would be the World's servant, and as it serves,
Choosing whatever task's most difficult
Among tasks not impossible, it takes
Upon the body and upon the soul
The coarseness of the drudge.

AHERNE

Before the full
It sought itself and afterwards the world.

ROBARTES

Because you are forgotten, half out of life,
And never wrote a book your thought is clear.
Reformer, merchant, statesman, learned man,
Dutiful husband, honest wife by turn,
Cradle upon cradle, and all in flight and all
Deformed because there is no deformity
But saves us from a dream.

AHERNE

And what of those
That the last servile crescent has set free?

ROBARTES

Because all dark, like those that are all light,
They are cast beyond the verge, and in a cloud,
Crying to one another like the bats;
And having no desire they cannot tell
What's good or bad, or what it is to triumph
At the perfection of one's own obedience;
And yet they speak what's blown into the mind;
Deformed beyond deformity, unformed,
Insipid as the dough before it is baked,
They change their bodies at a word.

AHERNE

And then?

ROBARTES

When all the dough has been so kneaded up
That it can take what form cook Nature fancy
The first thin crescent is wheeled round once more.

AHERNE

But the escape; the song's not finished yet.

ROBARTES

Hunchback and saint and fool are the last crescents.
The burning bow that once could shoot an arrow
Out of the up and down, the wagon wheel
Of beauty's cruelty and wisdom's chatter,
Out of that raving tide is drawn betwixt
Deformity of body and of mind.

AHERNE

Were not our beds far off I'd ring the bell,
Stand under the rough roof-timbers of the hall
Beside the castle door, where all is stark
Austerity, a place set out for wisdom
That he will never find; I'd play a part;
He would never know me after all these years
But take me for some drunken country man;
I'd stand and mutter there until he caught
'Hunchback and saint and fool,' and that they came
Under the three last crescents of the moon,

And then I’d stagger out. He’d crack his wits
Day after day, yet never find the meaning.

And then he laughed to think that what seemed hard
Should be so simple — a bat rose from the hazels
And circled round him with its squeaky cry,
The light in the tower window was put out.

THE CAT AND THE MOON

The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon
The creeping cat looked up.
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
For wander and wail as he would
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.
Minnaloushe runs in the grass,
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?
When two close kindred meet
What better than call a dance,
Maybe the moon may learn,
Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place,
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range?
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,

And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

THE SAINT AND THE HUNCHBACK

HUNCHBACK

Stand up and lift your hand and bless
A man that finds great bitterness
In thinking of his lost renown.
A Roman Caesar is held down
Under this hump.

SAINT

God tries each man
According to a different plan.
I shall not cease to bless because
I lay about me with the taws
That night and morning I may thrash
Greek Alexander from my flesh,
Augustus Caesar, and after these
That great rogue Alcibiades.

HUNCHBACK

To all that in your flesh have stood
And blessed, I give my gratitude,
Honoured by all in their degrees,
But most to Alcibiades.

TWO SONGS OF A FOOL

I

A speckled cat and a tame hare
Eat at my hearthstone
And sleep there;
And both look up to me alone
For learning and defence
As I look up to Providence.

I start out of my sleep to think
Some day I may forget
Their food and drink;
Or, the house door left unshut,
The hare may run till it's found
The horn's sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

I bear a burden that might well try
Men that do all by rule,
And what can I
That am a wandering witted fool
But pray to God that He ease
My great responsibilities.

II

I slept on my three-legged stool by the fire,
The speckled cat slept on my knee;
We never thought to enquire
Where the brown hare might be,

And whether the door were shut.
Who knows how she drank the wind
Stretched up on two legs from the mat,
Before she had settled her mind
To drum with her heel and to leap:
Had I but awakened from sleep
And called her name she had heard,
It may be, and had not stirred,
That now, it may be, has found
The horn’s sweet note and the tooth of the hound.

ANOTHER SONG OF A FOOL

This great purple butterfly,
In the prison of my hands,
Has a learning in his eye
Not a poor fool understands.

Once he lived a schoolmaster
With a stark, denying look,
A string of scholars went in fear
Of his great birch and his great book.

Like the clangour of a bell,
Sweet and harsh, harsh and sweet,
That is how he learnt so well
To take the roses for his meat.

THE DOUBLE VISION OF MICHAEL ROBARTES

I

On the grey rock of Cashel the mind's eye
Has called up the cold spirits that are born
When the old moon is vanished from the sky
And the new still hides her horn.

Under blank eyes and fingers never still
The particular is pounded till it is man,
When had I my own will?
Oh, not since life began.

Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent
By these wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood,
Themselves obedient,
Knowing not evil and good;

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.
They do not even feel, so abstract are they,
So dead beyond our death,
Triumph that we obey.

II

On the grey rock of Cashel I suddenly saw
A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw,
A Buddha, hand at rest,
Hand lifted up that blest;

And right between these two a girl at play
That it may be had danced her life away,
For now being dead it seemed
That she of dancing dreamed.

Although I saw it all in the mind's eye
There can be nothing solider till I die;
I saw by the moon's light
Now at its fifteenth night.

One lashed her tail; her eyes lit by the moon
Gazed upon all things known, all things unknown,
In triumph of intellect
With motionless head erect.

That other's moonlit eyeballs never moved,
Being fixed on all things loved, all things unloved,
Yet little peace he had
For those that love are sad.

Oh, little did they care who danced between,
And little she by whom her dance was seen
So that she danced. No thought,
Body perfection brought,

For what but eye and ear silence the mind
With the minute particulars of mankind?
Mind moved yet seemed to stop
As 'twere a spinning-top.

In contemplation had those three so wrought
Upon a moment, and so stretched it out
That they, time overthrown,
Were dead yet flesh and bone.

III

I knew that I had seen, had seen at last
That girl my unremembering nights hold fast
Or else my dreams that fly,
If I should rub an eye,

And yet in flying fling into my meat
A crazy juice that makes the pulses beat
As though I had been undone
By Homer's Paragon

Who never gave the burning town a thought;
To such a pitch of folly I am brought,
Being caught between the pull
Of the dark moon and the full,

The commonness of thought and images
That have the frenzy of our Western seas.
Thereon I made my moan,
And after kissed a stone,

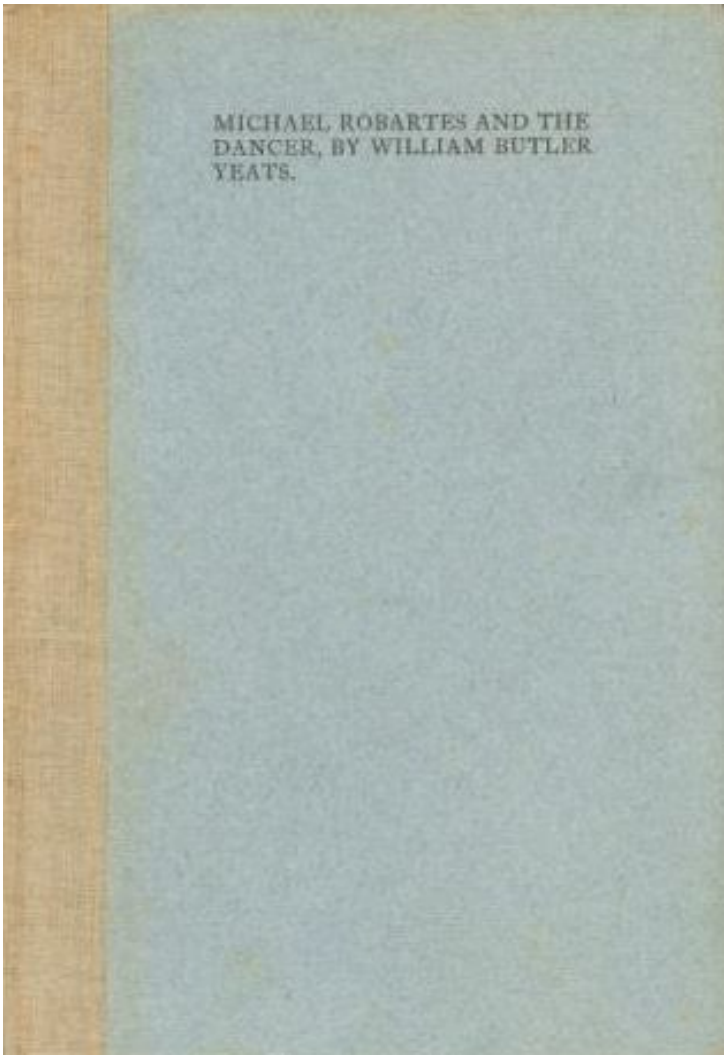
And after that arranged it in a song
Seeing that I, ignorant for so long,
Had been rewarded thus

In Cormac’s ruined house.

Michael Robartes and the Dancer

This 1921 anthology includes one of Yeats' most famous poems. *The Second Coming* was composed in 1919 and printed in *The Dial* the following year. The poem adopts Christian imagery of the Apocalypse and the second coming of Christ as an allegory to describe the atmosphere in post-war Europe. Now considered a major work of Modernist poetry, the poem has been construed as representing the French Revolutions, the Irish rebellion and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

In the early drafts of the poem, Yeats used the title *The Second Birth*, but substituted the phrase *The Second Coming*, opting for a reference to the Book of Revelation. However, instead of the appearance of Christ in the poem, Yeats describes a 'rough beast', suggesting The Beast in Revelation and the figure of the Antichrist. This sphinx-like beast had long captivated Yeats' imagination. He later wrote in the introduction to his play *The Resurrection*, "I began to imagine as always at my left side, just out of the range of sight, a brazen winged beast which I associated with laughing, ecstatic destruction", noting that the beast was "afterwards described in my poem *The Second Coming*." Since its first publication in 1920, the poem has intrigued readers across the world, encouraging many different interpretations of the enigmatic imagery.



The first edition

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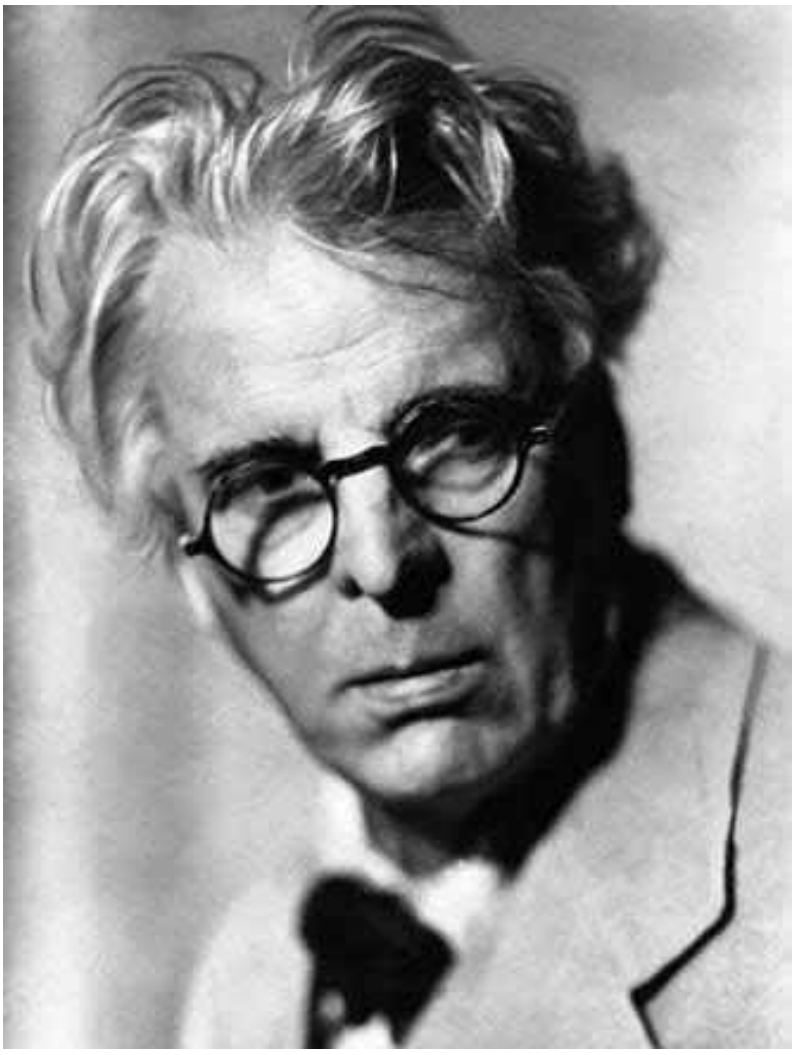

Yeats, c. 1920

MICHAEL ROBARTES AND THE DANCER

He. Opinion is not worth a rush;
In this altar-piece the knight,
Who grips his long spear so to push
That dragon through the fading light,
Loved the lady; and it's plain
The half-dead dragon was her thought,
That every morning rose again
And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.
Could the impossible come to pass
She would have time to turn her eyes,
Her lover thought, upon the glass
And on the instant would grow wise.

She. You mean they argued.

He. Put it so;
But bear in mind your lover's wage
Is what your looking-glass can show,
And that he will turn green with rage
At all that is not pictured there.

She. May I not put myself to college?

He. Go pluck Athena by the hair;
For what mere book can grant a knowledge
With an impassioned gravity
Appropriate to that beating breast,

That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?
And may the devil take the rest.

She. And must no beautiful woman be
Learned like a man?

He. Paul Veronese
And all his sacred company
Imagined bodies all their days
By the lagoon you love so much,
For proud, soft, ceremonious proof
That all must come to sight and touch;
While Michael Angelo's Sistine roof
His 'Morning' and his 'Night' disclose
How sinew that has been pulled tight,
Or it may be loosened in repose,
Can rule by supernatural right
Yet be but sinew.

She. I have heard said
There is great danger in the body.

He. Did God in portioning wine and bread
Give man His thought or His mere body?

She. My wretched dragon is perplexed.

He. I have principles to prove me right.
It follows from this Latin text
That blest souls are not composite,

And that all beautiful women may
Live in uncomposite blessedness,
And lead us to the like — if they
Will banish every thought, unless
The lineaments that please their view
When the long looking-glass is full,
Even from the foot-sole think it too.

She. They say such different things at school.

SOLOMON AND THE WITCH

AND thus declared that Arab lady:
‘Last night, where under the wild moon
On grassy mattress I had laid me,
Within my arms great Solomon,
I suddenly cried out in a strange tongue
Not his, not mine.’
Who understood
Whatever has been said, sighed, sung,
Howled, miau-d, barked, brayed, belled, yelled, cried, crowed,
Thereon replied: ‘A cockerel
Crew from a blossoming apple bough
Three hundred years before the Fall,
And never crew again till now,
And would not now but that he thought,
Chance being at one with Choice at last,
All that the brigand apple brought
And this foul world were dead at last.
He that crowed out eternity
Thought to have crowed it in again.
For though love has a spider’s eye
To find out some appropriate pain —
Aye, though all passion’s in the glance —
For every nerve, and tests a lover
With cruelties of Choice and Chance;
And when at last that murder’s over
Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,
For each an imagined image brings

And finds a real image there;
Yet the world ends when these two things,
Though several, are a single light,
When oil and wick are burned in one;
Therefore a blessed moon last night
Gave Sheba to her Solomon.'
'Yet the world stays.'
'If that be so,
Your cockerel found us in the wrong
Although he thought it. worth a crow.
Maybe an image is too strong
Or maybe is not strong enough.'
'The night has fallen; not a sound
In the forbidden sacred grove
Unless a petal hit the ground,
Nor any human sight within it
But the crushed grass where we have lain!
And the moon is wilder every minute.
O! Solomon! let us try again.'

AN IMAGE FROM A PAST LIFE

He. Never until this night have I been stirred.
The elaborate starlight throws a reflection
On the dark stream,
Till all the eddies gleam;
And thereupon there comes that scream
From terrified, invisible beast or bird:
Image of poignant recollection.

She. An image of my heart that is smitten through
Out of all likelihood, or reason,
And when at last,
Youth's bitterness being past,
I had thought that all my days were cast
Amid most lovely places; smitten as though
It had not learned its lesson.

He. Why have you laid your hands upon my eyes?
What can have suddenly alarmed you
Whereon 'twere best
My eyes should never rest?
What is there but the slowly fading west,
The river imaging the flashing skies,
All that to this moment charmed you?

She. A Sweetheart from another life floats there
As though she had been forced to linger
From vague distress
Or arrogant loveliness,

Merely to loosen out a tress
Among the starry eddies of her hair
Upon the paleness of a finger.

He. But why should you grow suddenly afraid
And start — I at your shoulder —
Imagining
That any night could bring
An image up, or anything
Even to eyes that beauty had driven mad,
But images to make me fonder?

She. Now She has thrown her arms above her head;
Whether she threw them up to flout me,
Or but to find,
Now that no fingers bind,
That her hair streams upon the wind,
I do not know, that know I am afraid
Of the hovering thing night brought me.

UNDER SATURN

DO not because this day I have grown saturnine
Imagine that lost love, inseparable from my thought
Because I have no other youth, can make me pine;
For how should I forget the wisdom that you brought,
The comfort that you made? Although my wits have gone
On a fantastic ride, my horse's flanks are spurred
By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen,
And of a Middleton, whose name you never heard,
And of a red-haired Yeats whose looks, although he died
Before my time, seem like a vivid memory.
You heard that labouring man who had served my people. He said
Upon the open road, near to the Sligo quay —
No, no, not said, but cried it out — 'You have come again,
And surely after twenty years it was time to come.'
I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain
Never to leave that valley his fathers called their home.

EASTER, 1916

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode our winged horse;
This other his helper and friend

Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vainglorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road.
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;

Minute by minute they live:
The stone’s in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven’s part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

SIXTEEN DEAD MEN

O BUT we talked at large before
The sixteen men were shot,
But who can talk of give and take,
What should be and what not
While those dead men are loitering there
To stir the boiling pot?
You say that we should still the land
Till Germany's overcome;
But who is there to argue that
Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?
And is their logic to outweigh
MacDonagh's bony thumb?
how could you dream they'd listen
That have an ear alone
For those new comrades they have found,
Lord Edward and Wolfe Tone,
Or meddle with our give and take
That converse bone to bone?

THE ROSE TREE

‘O WORDS are lightly spoken,’
Said Pearse to Connolly,
‘Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree;
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea.’
‘It needs to be but watered,’
James Connolly replied,
‘To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden’s pride.’
‘But where can we draw water,’
Said Pearse to Connolly,
‘When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There’s nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.’

ON A POLITICAL PRISONER

SHE that but little patience knew,
From childhood on, had now so much
A grey gull lost its fear and flew
Down to her cell and there alit,
And there endured her fingers' touch
And from her fingers ate its bit.
Did she in touching that lone wing
Recall the years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity:
Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking the foul ditch where they lie?
When long ago I saw her ride
Under Ben Bulben to the meet,
The beauty of her country-side
With all youth's lonely wildness stirred,
She seemed to have grown clean and sweet
Like any rock-bred, sea-borne bird:
Sea-borne, or balanced on the air
When first it sprang out of the nest
Upon some lofty rock to stare
Upon the cloudy canopy,
While under its storm-beaten breast
Cried out the hollows of the sea.

THE LEADERS OF THE CROWD

THEY must to keep their certainty accuse
All that are different of a base intent;
Pull down established honour; hawk for news
Whatever their loose fantasy invent
And murmur it with bated breath, as though
The abounding gutter had been Helicon
Or calumny a song. How can they know
Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shone,
And there alone, that have no Solitude?
So the crowd come they care not what may come.
They have loud music, hope every day renewed
And heartier loves; that lamp is from the tomb.

TOWARDS BREAK OF DAY

WAS it the double of my dream
The woman that by me lay
Dreamed, or did we halve a dream
Under the first cold gleam of day?
I thought: ‘There is a waterfall
Upon Ben Bulben side
That all my childhood counted dear;
Were I to travel far and wide
I could not find a thing so dear.’
My memories had magnified
So many times childish delight.
I would have touched it like a child
But knew my finger could but have touched
Cold stone and water. I grew wild.
Even accusing Heaven because
It had set down among its laws:
Nothing that we love over-much
Is ponderable to our touch.
I dreamed towards break of day,
The cold blown spray in my nostril.
But she that beside me lay
Had watched in bitterer sleep
The marvellous stag of Arthur,
That lofty white stag, leap
From mountain steep to steep.

DEMON AND BEAST

FOR certain minutes at the least
That crafty demon and that loud beast
That plague me day and night
Ran out of my sight;
Though I had long perned in the gyre,
Between my hatred and desire.
I saw my freedom won
And all laugh in the sun.
The glittering eyes in a death's head
Of old Luke Wadding's portrait said
Welcome, and the Ormondes all
Nodded upon the wall,
And even Strafford smiled as though
It made him happier to know
I understood his plan.
Now that the loud beast ran
There was no portrait in the Gallery
But beckoned to sweet company,
For all men's thoughts grew clear
Being dear as mine are dear.
But soon a tear-drop started up,
For aimless joy had made me stop
Beside the little lake
To watch a white gull take
A bit of bread thrown up into the air;
Now gyring down and perning there
He splashed where an absurd

Portly green-pated bird
Shook off the water from his back;
Being no more demoniac
A stupid happy creature
Could rouse my whole nature.
Yet I am certain as can be
That every natural victory
Belongs to beast or demon,
That never yet had freeman
Right mastery of natural things,
And that mere growing old, that brings
Chilled blood, this sweetness brought;
Yet have no dearer thought
Than that I may find out a way
To make it linger half a day.
O what a sweetness strayed
Through barren Thebaid,
Or by the Mareotic sea
When that exultant Anthony
And twice a thousand more
Starved upon the shore
And withered to a bag of bones!
What had the Caesars but their thrones?

THE SECOND COMING

TURNING and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at laSt,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

ONCE more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind.
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.
I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And-under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.
May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.
Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,

Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of plenty is undone.
In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wisc.
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.
May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.
My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind

Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.
An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?
Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy Still.
And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

A MEDITATION IN TIME OF WAR

FOR one throb of the artery,
While on that old grey stone I Sat
Under the old wind-broken tree,
I knew that One is animate,
Mankind inanimate fantasy’.

TO BE CARVED ON A STONE AT THOOR BALLYLEE

I, THE poet William Yeats,
With old mill boards and sea-green slates,
And smithy work from the Gort forge,
Restored this tower for my wife George;
And may these characters remain
When all is ruin once again.

The Tower

This book of poems was first published in 1928 and features some of Yeats' most popular works, including *Sailing to Byzantium*, *Leda and the Swan* and *Among School Children*. The title of the collection refers to the Thoor Ballylee castle which Yeats purchased in 1916 for £35. He and his family lived in the Norman tower from 1921 to 1929. Many of the poems in the collection concern the poet's confrontation with old age, often represented by the recurring image of the tower.

The poem *Sailing to Byzantium* comprises four stanzas in ottava rima, each made up of eight ten-syllable lines. The poem portrays a voyage to Constantinople (Byzantium) as a metaphor for a spiritual journey. Yeats explores his thoughts and musings on how immortality, art and the human spirit may converge. Through the use of various poetic techniques, the poet depicts a metaphorical journey of a man pursuing his own vision of eternal life and his conception of paradise.

Written when Yeats was 60 years old, *Sailing to Byzantium* is one of the most celebrated literary works to explore the agony of old age and the imaginative and spiritual work required to remain a vital individual, even when the heart is "fastened to a dying animal" (the body). Yeats' solution to old age is to leave the country of the young and travel to Byzantium, where the sages in the city's famous gold mosaics could become the "singing-masters" of his soul.

Thoor Ballylee Castle, a fortified 13th century Norman tower in County Galway

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The first edition

SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
 — Those dying generations — at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out Of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

THE TOWER

I

What shall I do with this absurdity —
O heart, O troubled heart — this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail?
Never had I more
Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
That more expected the impossible —
No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly,
Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulben's back
And had the livelong summer day to spend.
It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
Until imagination, ear and eye,
Can be content with argument and deal
In abstract things; or be derided by
A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

II

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;
And send imagination forth
Under the day's declining beam, and call
Images and memories

From ruin or from ancient trees,
For I would ask a question of them all.

Beyond that ridge lived Mrs. French, and once
When every silver candlestick or sconce
Lit up the dark mahogany and the wine.
A serving-man, that could divine
That most respected lady's every wish,
Ran and with the garden shears
Clipped an insolent farmer's ears
And brought them in a little covered dish.

Some few remembered still when I was young
A peasant girl commended by a Song,
Who'd lived somewhere upon that rocky place,
And praised the colour of her face,
And had the greater joy in praising her,
Remembering that, if walked she there,
Farmers jostled at the fair
So great a glory did the song confer.

And certain men, being maddened by those rhymes,
Or else by toasting her a score of times,
Rose from the table and declared it right
To test their fancy by their sight;
But they mistook the brightness of the moon
For the prosaic light of day —
Music had driven their wits astray —
And one was drowned in the great bog of Cloone.

Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;
Yet, now I have considered it, I find
That nothing strange; the tragedy began
With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.
O may the moon and sunlight seem
One inextricable beam,
For if I triumph I must make men mad.

And I myself created Hanrahan
And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn
From somewhere in the neighbouring cottages.
Caught by an old man's juggleries
He stumbled, tumbled, fumbled to and fro
And had but broken knees for hire
And horrible splendour of desire;
I thought it all out twenty years ago:

Good fellows shuffled cards in an old bawn;
And when that ancient ruffian's turn was on
He so bewitched the cards under his thumb
That all but the one card became
A pack of hounds and not a pack of cards,
And that he changed into a hare.
Hanrahan rose in frenzy there
And followed up those baying creatures towards —

O towards I have forgotten what — enough!
I must recall a man that neither love

Nor music nor an enemy's clipped ear
Could, he was so harried, cheer;
A figure that has grown so fabulous
There's not a neighbour left to say
When he finished his dog's day:
An ancient bankrupt master of this house.

Before that ruin came, for centuries,
Rough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to the knees
Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow stairs,
And certain men-at-arms there were
Whose images, in the Great Memory stored,
Come with loud cry and panting breast
To break upon a sleeper's rest
While their great wooden dice beat on the board.

As I would question all, come all who can;
Come old, necessitous. half-mounted man;
And bring beauty's blind rambling celebrant;
The red man the juggler sent
Through God-forsaken meadows; Mrs. French,
Gifted with so fine an ear;
The man drowned in a bog's mire,
When mocking Muses chose the country wench.

Did all old men and women, rich and poor,
Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,
Whether in public or in secret rage
As I do now against old age?

But I have found an answer in those eyes
That are impatient to be gone;
Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan,
For I need all his mighty memories.

Old lecher with a love on every wind,
Bring up out of that deep considering mind
All that you have discovered in the grave,
For it is certain that you have
Reckoned up every unforeknown, unseeing
plunge, lured by a softening eye,
Or by a touch or a sigh,
Into the labyrinth of another's being;

Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost.?
If on the lost, admit you turned aside
From a great labyrinth out of pride,
Cowardice, some silly over-subtle thought
Or anything called conscience once;
And that if memory recur, the sun's
Under eclipse and the day blotted out.

III

It is time that I wrote my will;
I choose upstanding men
That climb the streams until
The fountain leap, and at dawn
Drop their cast at the side

Of dripping stone; I declare
They shall inherit my pride,
The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State.
Neither to slaves that were spat on,
Nor to the tyrants that spat,
The people of Burke and of Grattan
That gave, though free to refuse —
pride, like that of the morn,
When the headlong light is loose,
Or that of the fabulous horn,
Or that of the sudden shower
When all streams are dry,
Or that of the hour
When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
And there sing his last song.
And I declare my faith:
I mock Plotinus' thought
And cry in Plato's teeth,
Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that

That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar paradise.

I have prepared my peace
With learned Italian things
And the proud stones of Greece,
Poet's imaginings
And memories of love,
Memories of the words of women,
All those things whereof
Man makes a superhuman,
Mirror-resembling dream.

As at the loophole there
The daws chatter and scream,
And drop twigs layer upon layer.
When they have mounted up,
The mother bird will rest
On their hollow top,
And so warm her wild nest.

I leave both faith and pride
To young upstanding men
Climbing the mountain-side,
That under bursting dawn
They may drop a fly;
Being of that metal made

Till it was broken by
This sedentary trade.

Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school
Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come —
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath — .
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird’s sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.

MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR

I

Ancestral Houses

Surely among a rich man s flowering lawns,
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,
Life overflows without ambitious pains;
And rains down life until the basin spills,
And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains
As though to choose whatever shape it wills
And never stoop to a mechanical
Or servile shape, at others' beck and call.
Mere dreams, mere dreams! Yet Homer had not Sung
Had he not found it certain beyond dreams
That out of life's own self-delight had sprung
The abounding glittering jet; though now it seems
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
And not a fountain, were the symbol which
Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.
Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artist in, that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
The gentleness none there had ever known;
But when the master's buried mice can play.
And maybe the great-grandson of that house,
For all its bronze and marble, 's but a mouse.

O what if gardens where the peacock strays
With delicate feet upon old terraces,
Or else all Juno from an urn displays
Before the indifferent garden deities;
O what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways
Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease
And Childhood a delight for every sense,
But take our greatness with our violence?
What if the glory of escutcheoned doors,
And buildings that a haughtier age designed,
The pacing to and fro on polished floors
Amid great chambers and long galleries, lined
With famous portraits of our ancestors;
What if those things the greatest of mankind
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
But take our greatness with our bitterness?

II
My House

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,
An acre of stony ground,
Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,
Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,
The sound of the rain or sound
Of every wind that blows;
The stilted water-hen
Crossing Stream again

Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows;
A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,
A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,
A candle and written page.
Il Penseroso's Platonist toiled on
In some like chamber, shadowing forth
How the daemonic rage
Imagined everything.
Benighted travellers
From markets and from fairs
Have seen his midnight candle glimmering.
Two men have founded here. A man-at-arms
Gathered a score of horse and spent his days
In this tumultuous spot,
Where through long wars and sudden night alarms
His dwindling score and he seemed castaways
Forgetting and forgot;
And I, that after me
My bodily heirs may find,
To exalt a lonely mind,
Befitting emblems of adversity.

III
My Table

Two heavy trestles, and a board
Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword,
By pen and paper lies,
That it may moralise

My days out of their aimlessness.
A bit of an embroidered dress
Covers its wooden sheath.
Chaucer had not drawn breath
When it was forged. In Sato's house,
Curved like new moon, moon-luminous
It lay five hundred years.
Yet if no change appears
No moon; only an aching heart
Conceives a changeless work of art.
Our learned men have urged
That when and where 'twas forged
A marvellous accomplishment,
In painting or in pottery, went
From father unto son
And through the centuries ran
And seemed unchanging like the sword.
Soul's beauty being most adored,
Men and their business took
Me soul's unchanging look;
For the most rich inheritor,
Knowing that none could pass Heaven's door,
That loved inferior art,
Had such an aching heart
That he, although a country's talk
For silken clothes and stately walk.
Had waking wits; it seemed
Juno's peacock screamed.

IV

My Descendants

Having inherited a vigorous mind
From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams
And leave a woman and a man behind
As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems
Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the wind,
Scarce spread a glory to the morning beams,
But the torn petals strew the garden plot;
And there's but common greenness after that.
And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
Through too much business with the passing hour,
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?
May this laborious stair and this stark tower
Become a roofless min that the owl
May build in the cracked masonry and cry
Her desolation to the desolate sky.
The primum Mobile that fashioned us
Has made the very owls in circles move;
And I, that count myself most prosperous,
Seeing that love and friendship are enough,
For an old neighbour's friendship chose the house
And decked and altered it for a girl's love,
And know whatever flourish and decline
These stones remain their monument and mine.

V

The Road at My Door

An affable Irregular,
A heavily-built Falstaffian man,
Comes cracking jokes of civil war
As though to die by gunshot were
The finest play under the sun.
A brown Lieutenant and his men,
Half dressed in national uniform,
Stand at my door, and I complain
Of the foul weather, hail and rain,
A pear-tree broken by the storm.
I count those feathered balls of soot
The moor-hen guides upon the stream.
To silence the envy in my thought;
And turn towards my chamber, caught
In the cold snows of a dream.

VI

The Stare’s Nest by My Window

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the state.
We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere

A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no cleat fact to be discerned:
Come build in he empty house of the stare.
A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.
We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
More Substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

VII
I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's
Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.
Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.
"Vengeance upon the murderers,' the cry goes up,
"Vengeance for Jacques Molay.' In cloud-pale rags, or in lace,
The rage-driven, rage-tormented, and rage-hungry troop,

Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at arm or at face,
Plunges towards nothing, arms and fingers spreading wide
For the embrace of nothing; and I, my wits astray
Because of all that senseless tumult, all but cried
For vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay.
Their legs long, delicate and slender, aquamarine their eyes,
Magical unicorns bear ladies on their backs.
The ladies close their musing eyes. No prophecies,
Remembered out of Babylonian almanacs,
Have closed the ladies' eyes, their minds are but a pool
Where even longing drowns under its own excess;
Nothing but stillness can remain when hearts are full
Of their own sweetness, bodies of their loveliness.
The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of aquamarine,
The quivering half-closed eyelids, the rags of cloud or of lace,
Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms it has made lean,
Give place to an indifferent multitude, give place
To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting reverie,
Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone,
Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,
The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon.
I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
In something that all others understand or share;
But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth
A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,
It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,

The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN

I.

Many ingenious lovely things are gone
That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
protected from the circle of the moon
That pitches common things about. There stood
Amid the ornamental bronze and stone
An ancient image made of olive wood —
And gone are Phidias' famous ivories
And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

We too had many pretty toys when young:
A law indifferent to blame or praise,
To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;
Public opinion ripening for so long
We thought it would outlive all future days.
O what fine thought we had because we thought
That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.

All teeth were drawn, all ancient tricks unlearned,
And a great army but a showy thing;
What matter that no cannon had been turned
Into a ploughshare? Parliament and king
Thought that unless a little powder burned
The trumpeters might burst with trumpeting
And yet it lack all glory; and perchance
The guardsmen's drowsy chargers would not prance.

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
On master-work of intellect or hand,
No honour leave its mighty monument,
Has but one comfort left: all triumph would
But break upon his ghostly solitude.

But is there any comfort to be found?
Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
What more is there to say? That country round
None dared admit, if Such a thought were his,
Incendiary or bigot could be found
To burn that stump on the Acropolis,
Or break in bits the famous ivories
Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.

II.

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
It seemed that a dragon of air
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
Or hurried them off on its own furious path;
So the platonic Year
Whirls out new right and wrong,
Whirls in the old instead;
All men are dancers and their tread
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

III

Some moralist or mythological poet
Compares the solitary soul to a swan;
I am satisfied with that,
Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it,
Before that brief gleam of its life be gone,
An image of its state;
The wings half spread for flight,
The breast thrust out in pride
Whether to play, or to ride
Those winds that clamour of approaching night.

A man in his own secret meditation
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made
In art or politics;
Some Platonist affirms that in the station
Where we should cast off body and trade

The ancient habit sticks,
And that if our works could
But vanish with our breath
That were a lucky death,
For triumph can but mar our solitude.

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
To end all things, to end
What my laborious life imagined, even
The half-imagined, the half-written page;
O but we dreamed to mend
Whatever mischief seemed
To afflict mankind, but now
That winds of winter blow
Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.

IV.

We, who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

V.

Come let us mock at the great
That had such burdens on the mind
And toiled so hard and late

To leave some monument behind,
Nor thought of the levelling wind.

Come let us mock at the wise;
With all those calendars whereon
They fixed old aching eyes,
They never saw how seasons run,
And now but gape at the sun.

Come let us mock at the good
That fancied goodness might be gay,
And sick of solitude
Might proclaim a holiday:
Wind shrieked — and where are they?

Mock mockers after that
That would not lift a hand maybe
To help good, wise or great
To bar that foul storm out, for we
Traffic in mockery.

VI.

Violence upon the roads: violence of horses;
Some few have handsome riders, are garlanded
On delicate sensitive ear or tossing mane,
But wearied running round and round in their courses
All break and vanish, and evil gathers head:
Herodias' daughters have returned again,
A sudden blast of dusty wind and after

Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind;
And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,
According to the wind, for all are blind.
But now wind drops, dust settles; thereupon
There lurches past, his great eyes without thought
Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,
That insolent fiend Robert Artisson
To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought
Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks.

1919

THE WHEEL

Through winter-time we call on spring,
And through the spring on summer call,
And when abounding hedges ring
Declare that winter’s best of all;
And after that there s nothing good
Because the spring-time has not come —
Nor know that what disturbs our blood
Is but its longing for the tomb.

YOUTH AND AGE

Much did I rage when young,
Being by the world oppressed,
But now with flattering tongue
It speeds the parting guest.

THE NEW FACES

If you, that have grown old, were the first dead,
Neither catalpa tree nor scented lime
Should hear my living feet, nor would I tread
Where we wrought that shall break the teeth of Time.
Let the new faces play what tricks they will
In the old rooms; night can outbalance day,
Our shadows rove the garden gravel still,
The living seem more shadowy than they.

A PRAYER FOR MY SON

Bid a strong ghost stand at the head
That my Michael may sleep sound,
Nor cry, nor turn in the bed
Till his morning meal come round;
And may departing twilight keep
All dread afar till morning's back.
That his mother may not lack
Her fill of sleep.

Bid the ghost have sword in fist:
Some there are, for I avow
Such devilish things exist,
Who have planned his murder, for they know
Of some most haughty deed or thought
That waits upon his future days,
And would through hatred of the bays
Bring that to nought.

Though You can fashion everything
From nothing every day, and teach
The morning stats to sing,
You have lacked articulate speech
To tell Your simplest want, and known,
Wailing upon a woman's knee,
All of that worst ignominy
Of flesh and bone;

And when through all the town there ran
The servants of Your enemy,
A woman and a man,
Unless the Holy Writings lie,
Hurried through the smooth and rough
And through the fertile and waste,
protecting, till the danger past,
With human love.

TWO SONGS FROM A PLAY

I

I saw a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side.
And lay the heart upon her hand
And bear that beating heart away;
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,
As though God's death were but a play.

Another Troy must rise and set,
Another lineage feed the crow,
Another Argo's painted prow
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.
The Roman Empire stood appalled:
It dropped the reins of peace and war
When that fierce virgin and her Star
Out of the fabulous darkness called.

II

In pity for man's darkening thought
He walked that room and issued thence
In Galilean turbulence;
The Babylonian starlight brought
A fabulous, formless darkness in;
Odour of blood when Christ was slain

Made all platonic tolerance vain
And vain all Doric discipline.

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day.
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.

FRAGMENTS

I

Locke sank into a swoon;
The Garden died;
God took the spinning-jenny
Out of his side.

II

Where got I that truth?
Out of a medium's mouth.
Out of nothing it came,
Out of the forest loam,
Out of dark night where lay
The crowns of Nineveh.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

ON A PICTURE OF A BLACK CENTAUR BY EDMUND DULAC

Your hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood,
Even where horrible green parrots call and swing.
My works are all stamped down into the sultry mud.
I knew that horse-play, knew it for a murderous thing.
What wholesome sun has ripened is wholesome food to eat,
And that alone; yet I, being driven half insane
Because of some green wing, gathered old mummy wheat
In the mad abstract dark and ground it grain by grain
And after baked it slowly in an oven; but now
I bring full-flavoured wine out of a barrel found
Where seven Ephesian topers slept and never knew
When Alexander's empire passed, they slept so sound.
Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep;
I have loved you better than my soul for all my words,
And there is none so fit to keep a watch and keep
Unwearied eyes upon those horrible green birds.

AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher and to sing,
To study reading-books and histories,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
In the best modern way — the children's eyes
In momentary wonder stare upon

II

A sixty-year-old smiling public man.
I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
Above a sinking fire. a tale that she
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy —
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at that age —
For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage —
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,

And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats into the mind —
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledaean kind
Had pretty plumage once — enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
Honey of generation had betrayed,
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
As recollection or the drug decide,
Would think her Son, did she but see that shape
With sixty or more winters on its head,
A compensation for the pang of his birth,
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
Solider Aristotle played the taws

Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,
But those the candles light are not as those
That animate a mother's reveries,
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
And yet they too break hearts — O presences
That passion, piety or affection knows,
And that all heavenly glory symbolise —
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

COLONUS' PRAISE

From 'Oedipus at Colonus'

{Chorus.} Come praise Colonus' horses, and come praise
The wine-dark of the wood's intricacies,
The nightingale that deafens daylight there,
If daylight ever visit where,
Unvisited by tempest or by sun,
Immortal ladies tread the ground
Dizzy with harmonious sound,
Semele's lad a gay companion.

And yonder in the gymnasts' garden thrives
The self-sown, self-begotten shape that gives
Athenian intellect its mastery,
Even the grey-leaved olive-tree
Miracle-bred out of the living stone;
Nor accident of peace nor war
Shall wither that old marvel, for
The great grey-eyed Athene stares thereon.

Who comes into this country, and has come
Where golden crocus and narcissus bloom,
Where the Great Mother, mourning for her daughter
And beauty-drunken by the water
Glittering among grey-leaved olive-trees,
Has plucked a flower and sung her loss;
Who finds abounding Cephisus
Has found the loveliest spectacle there is.

Because this country has a pious mind
And so remembers that when all mankind
But trod the road, or splashed about the shore,
Poseidon gave it bit and oar,
Every Colonus lad or lass discourses
Of that oar and of that bit;
Summer and winter, day and night,
Of horses and horses of the sea, white horses.

WISDOM

The true faith discovered was
When painted panel, statuary.
Glass-mosaic, window-glass,
Amended what was told awry
By some peasant gospeller;
Swept the Sawdust from the floor
Of that working-carpenter.
Miracle had its playtime where
In damask clothed and on a seat
Chryselephantine, cedar-boarded,
His majestic Mother sat
Stitching at a purple hoarded
That He might be nobly breeched
In starry towers of Babylon
Noah’s freshet never reached.
King Abundance got Him on
Innocence; and Wisdom He.
That cognomen sounded best
Considering what wild infancy
Drove horror from His Mother’s breast.

THE FOOL BY THE ROADSIDE

When all works that have
From cradle run to grave
From grave to cradle run instead;
When thoughts that a fool
Has wound upon a spool
Are but loose thread, are but loose thread;

When cradle and spool are past
And I mere shade at last
Coagulate of stuff
Transparent like the wind,
I think that I may find
A faithful love, a faithful love.

THE HERO, THE GIRL, AND THE FOOL

The Girl. I rage at my own image in the glass
That's so unlike myself that when you praise it
It is as though you praised another, or even
Mocked me with praise of my mere opposite;
And when I wake toward morn I dread myself,
For the heart cries that what deception wins
Cruelty must keep; therefore be warned and go
If you have seen that image and not the woman.

The Hero. I have raged at my own strength because you
Have loved it.

The Girl. If you are no more strength than I am beauty
I had better find a convent and turn nun;
A nun at least has all men's reverence
And needs no cruelty.

The Hero. I have heard one say
That men have reverence for their holiness
And not themselves.

The Girl. Say on and say
That only God had loved us for ourselves,
But what care I that long for a man's love?

The Fool by the Roadside. When all works that have
From cradle run to grave
From grave to cradle run instead;
When thoughts that a fool

Has wound upon a spool
Are but loose thread, are but loose thread;

When cradle and spool are past
And I mere shade at last
Coagulate of stuff
Transparent like the wind,
I think that I may find
A faithful love, a faithful love.

OWEN AHERNE AND HIS DANCERS

I

A strange thing surely that my Heart, when love had come unsought
Upon the Norman upland or in that poplar shade,
Should find no burden but itself and yet should be worn out.
It could not bear that burden and therefore it went mad.

The south wind brought it longing, and the east wind despair,
The west wind made it pitiful, and the north wind afraid.
It feared to give its love a hurt with all the tempest there;
It feared the hurt that she could give and therefore it went mad.

I can exchange opinion with any neighbouring mind,
I have as healthy flesh and blood as any rhymer's had,
But O! my Heart could bear no more when the upland caught the wind;
I ran, I ran, from my love's side because my Heart went mad.

II

The Heart behind its rib laughed out. "You have called me mad,' it said,
"Because I made you turn away and run from that young child;
How could she mate with fifty years that was so wildly bred?
Let the cage bird and the cage bird mate and the wild bird mate in the wild."
"You but imagine lies all day, O murderer," I replied.
"And all those lies have but one end, poor wretches to betray;
I did not find in any cage the woman at my side.
O but her heart would break to learn my thoughts are far away."
"Speak all your mind," my Heart sang out, "speak all your mind; who cares,
Now that your tongue cannot persuade the child till she mistake

Her childish gratitude for love and match your fifty years?
O let her choose a young man now and all for his wild sake."

A MAN YOUNG AND OLD

I.
First Love

Though nurtured like the sailing moon
In beauty's murderous brood,
She walked awhile and blushed awhile
And on my pathway stood
Until I thought her body bore
A heart of flesh and blood.

But since I laid a hand thereon
And found a heart of stone
I have attempted many things
And not a thing is done,
For every hand is lunatic
That travels on the moon.

She smiled and that transfigured me
And left me but a lout,
Maundering here, and maundering there,
Emptier of thought
Than the heavenly circuit of its stars
When the moon sails out.

II.
Human Dignity

Like the moon her kindness is,
If kindness I may call

What has no comprehension in’t,
But is the same for all
As though my sorrow were a scene
Upon a painted wall.

So like a bit of stone I lie
Under a broken tree.
I could recover if I shrieked
My heart’s agony
To passing bird, but I am dumb
From human dignity.

III.
The Mermaid

A mermaid found a swimming lad,
Picked him for her own,
Pressed her body to his body,
Laughed; and plunging down
Forgot in cruel happiness
That even lovers drown.

IV.
The Death of the Hare

I have pointed out the yelling pack,
The hare leap to the wood,
And when I pass a compliment
Rejoice as lover should

At the drooping of an eye,
At the mantling of the blood.

Then’ suddenly my heart is wrung
By her distracted air
And I remember wildness lost
And after, swept from there,
Am set down standing in the wood
At the death of the hare.

V.
The Empty Cup

A crazy man that found a cup,
When all but dead of thirst,
Hardly dared to wet his mouth
Imagining, moon-accursed,
That another mouthful
And his beating heart would burst.
October last I found it too
But found it dry as bone,
And for that reason am I crazed
And my sleep is gone.

VI.
His Memories

We should be hidden from their eyes,
Being but holy shows
And bodies broken like a thorn

Whereon the bleak north blows,
To think of buried Hector
And that none living knows.

The women take so little stock
In what I do or say
They'd sooner leave their cosseting
To hear a jackass bray;
My arms are like the twisted thorn
And yet there beauty lay;

The first of all the tribe lay there
And did such pleasure take —
She who had brought great Hector down
And put all Troy to wreck —
That she cried into this ear,
'Strike me if I shriek.'

VII.
The Friends of his Youth

Laughter not time destroyed my voice
And put that crack in it,
And when the moon's pot-bellied
I get a laughing fit,
For that old Madge comes down the lane,
A stone upon her breast,
And a cloak wrapped about the stone,
And she can get no rest
With singing hush and hush-a-bye;

She that has been wild
And barren as a breaking wave
Thinks that the stone's a child.

And Peter that had great affairs
And was a pushing man
Shrieks, 'I am King of the Peacocks,'
And perches on a stone;
And then I laugh till tears run down
And the heart thumps at my side,
Remembering that her shriek was love
And that he shrieks from pride.

VIII.
Summer and Spring

We sat under an old thorn-tree
And talked away the night,
Told all that had been said or done
Since first we saw the light,
And when we talked of growing up
Knew that we'd halved a soul
And fell the one in t'other's arms
That we might make it whole;
Then peter had a murdering look,
For it seemed that he and she
Had spoken of their childish days
Under that very tree.
O what a bursting out there was,

And what a blossoming,
When we had all the summer-time
And she had all the spring!

IX.
The Secrets of the Old

I have old women's secrets now
That had those of the young;
Madge tells me what I dared not think
When my blood was strong,
And what had drowned a lover once
Sounds like an old song.

Though Margery is stricken dumb
If thrown in Madge's way,
We three make up a solitude;
For none alive to-day
Can know the stories that we know
Or say the things we say:

How such a man pleased women most
Of all that are gone,
How such a pair loved many years
And such a pair but one,
Stories of the bed of straw
Or the bed of down.

X.
His Wildness

O bid me mount and sail up there
Amid the cloudy wrack,
For peg and Meg and Paris' love
That had so straight a back,
Are gone away, and some that stay
Have changed their silk for sack.

Were I but there and none to hear
I'd have a peacock cry,
For that is natural to a man
That lives in memory,
Being all alone I'd nurse a stone
And sing it lullaby.

XI.
From 'Oedipus at Colonus'

Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span;
Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged man;
Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be vain.

Even from that delight memory treasures so,
Death, despair, division of families, all entanglements of mankind grow,
As that old wandering beggar and these God-hated children know.

In the long echoing street the laughing dancers throng,
The bride is carried to the bridegroom's chamber through torchlight and tumultuous song;
I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long.

Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked into the eye of day;
The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.

THE THREE MONUMENTS

They hold their public meetings where
Our most renowned patriots stand,
One among the birds of the air,
A stumpier on either hand;
And all the popular statesmen say
That purity built up the State
And after kept it from decay;
And let all base ambition be,
For intellect would make us proud
And pride bring in impurity:
The three old rascals laugh aloud.

THE GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

KUSTA BEN LUKA is my name, I write
To Abd Al-Rabban; fellow-roysterer once,
Now the good Caliph's learned Treasurer,
And for no ear but his.
Carry this letter
Through the great gallery of the Treasure House
Where banners of the Caliphs hang, night-coloured
But brilliant as the night's embroidery,
And wait war's music; pass the little gallery;
Pass books of learning from Byzantium
Written in gold upon a purple stain,
And pause at last, I was about to say,
At the great book of Sappho's song; but no,
For should you leave my letter there, a boy's
Love-lorn, indifferent hands might come upon it
And let it fall unnoticed to the floor.
pause at the Treatise of parmenides
And hide it there, for Caiphs to world's end
Must keep that perfect, as they keep her song,
So great its fame.
When fitting time has passed
The parchment will disclose to some learned man
A mystery that else had found no chronicler
But the wild Bedouin. Though I approve
Those wanderers that welcomed in their tents
What great Harun Al-Rashid, occupied
With Persian embassy or Grecian war,

Must needs neglect, I cannot hide the truth
That wandering in a desert, featureless
As air under a wing, can give birds' wit.
In after time they will speak much of me
And speak but fantasy. Recall the year
When our beloved Caliph put to death
His Vizir Jaffer for an unknown reason:
'If but the shirt upon my body knew it
I'd tear it off and throw it in the fire.'
That speech was all that the town knew, but he
Seemed for a while to have grown young again;
Seemed so on purpose, muttered Jaffer's friends,
That none might know that he was conscience-struck —
But that s a traitor's thought. Enough for me
That in the early summer of the year
The mightiest of the princes of the world
Came to the least considered of his courtiers;
Sat down upon the fountain's marble edge,
One hand amid the goldfish in the pool;
And thereupon a colloquy took place
That I commend to all the chroniclers
To show how violent great hearts can lose
Their bitterness and find the honeycomb.
'I have brought a slender bride into the house;
You know the saying, ''Change the bride with spring.''
And she and I, being sunk in happiness,
Cannot endure to think you tread these paths,

When evening stirs the jasmine bough, and yet
Are brideless.’

‘I am falling into years.’
‘But such as you and I do not seem old
Like men who live by habit. Every day
I ride with falcon to the river’s edge
Or carry the ringed mail upon my back,
Or court a woman; neither enemy,
Game-bird, nor woman does the same thing twice;
And so a hunter carries in the eye
A mimic of youth. Can poet’s thought
That springs from body and in body falls
Like this pure jet, now lost amid blue sky,
Now bathing lily leaf and fish’s scale,
Be mimicry?’
‘What matter if our souls
Are nearer to the surface of the body
Than souls that start no game and turn no rhyme!
The soul’s own youth and not the body’s youth
Shows through our lineaments. My candle’s bright,
My lantern is too loyal not to show
That it was made in your great father’s reign,

And yet the jasmine season warms our blood.’

‘Great prince, forgive the freedom of my speech:
You think that love has seasons, and you think
That if the spring bear off what the spring gave

The heart need suffer no defeat; but I
Who have accepted the Byzantine faith,
That seems unnatural to Arabian minds,
Think when I choose a bride I choose for ever;
And if her eye should not grow bright for mine
Or brighten only for some younger eye,
My heart could never turn from daily ruin,
Nor find a remedy.'

'But what if I
Have lit upon a woman who so shares
Your thirst for those old crabbed mysteries,
So strains to look beyond Our life, an eye
That never knew that strain would scarce seem bright,
And yet herself can seem youth's very fountain,
Being all brimmed with life?'

'Were it but true
I would have found the best that life can give,
Companionship in those mysterious things
That make a man's soul or a woman's soul
Itself and not some other soul.'

'That love
Must needs be in this life and in what follows
Unchanging and at peace, and it is right
Every philosopher should praise that love.
But I being none can praise its opposite.
It makes my passion stronger but to think
Like passion stirs the peacock and his mate,

The wild stag and the doe; that mouth to mouth
Is a man's mockery of the changeless soul.'

And thereupon his bounty gave what now
Can shake more blossom from autumnal chill
Than all my bursting springtime knew. A girl
Perched in some window of her mother's housc
Had watched my daily passage to and fro;
Had heard impossible history of my past;
Imagined some impossible history
Lived at my side; thought time's disfiguring touch
Gave but more reason for a woman's care.
Yet was it love of me, or was it love
Of the stark mystery that has dazed my sight,
perplexed her fantasy and planned her care?
Or did the torchlight of that mystery
Pick out my features in such light and shade
Two contemplating passions chose one theme
Through sheer bewilderment? She had not paced
The garden paths, nor counted up the rooms,
Before she had spread a book upon her knees
And asked about the pictures or the text;
And often those first days I saw her stare
On old dry writing in a learned tongue,
On old dry faggots that could never please
The extravagance of spring; or move a hand
As if that writing or the figured page
Were some dear cheek.
Upon a moonless night

I sat where I could watch her sleeping form,
And wrote by candle-light; but her form moved.
And fearing that my light disturbed her sleep
I rose that I might screen it with a cloth.
I heard her voice, ‘Turn that I may expound
What’s bowed your shoulder and made pale your cheek
And saw her sitting upright on the bed;
Or was it she that spoke or some great Djinn?
I say that a Djinn spoke. A livelong hour
She seemed the learned man and I the child;
Truths without father came, truths that no book
Of all the uncounted books that I have read,
Nor thought out of her mind or mine begot,
Self-born, high-born, and solitary truths,
Those terrible implacable straight lines
Drawn through the wandering vegetative dream,
Even those truths that when my bones are dust
Must drive the Arabian host.
The voice grew still,
And she lay down upon her bed and slept,
But woke at the first gleam of day, rose up
And swept the house and sang about her work
In childish ignorance of all that passed.
A dozen nights of natural sleep, and then
When the full moon swam to its greatest height
She rose, and with her eyes shut fast in sleep
Walked through the house. Unnoticed and unfelt
I wrapped her in a hooded cloak, and she,

Half running, dropped at the first ridge of the desert
And there marked out those emblems on the sand
That day by day I study and marvel at,
With her white finger. I led her home asleep
And once again she rose and swept the house
In childish ignorance of all that passed.
Even to-day, after some seven years
When maybe thrice in every moon her mouth
Murmured the wisdom of the desert Djinns,
She keeps that ignorance, nor has she now
That first unnatural interest in my books.
It seems enough that I am there; and yet,
Old fellow-student, whose most patient ear
Heard all the anxiety of my passionate youth,
It seems I must buy knowledge with my peace.
What if she lose her ignorance and so
Dream that I love her only for the voice,
That every gift and every word of praise
Is but a payment for that midnight voice
That is to age what milk is to a child?
Were she to lose her love, because she had lost
Her confidence in mine, or even lose
Its first simplicity, love, voice and all,
All my fine feathers would be plucked away
And I left shivering. The voice has drawn
A quality of wisdom from her love's
Particular quality. The signs and shapes;
All those abstractions that you fancied were

From the great Treatise of parmenides;
All, all those gyres and cubes and midnight things
Are but a new expression of her body
Drunk with the bitter sweetness of her youth.
And now my utmost mystery is out.
A woman’s beauty is a storm-tossed banner;
Under it wisdom stands, and I alone —
Of all Arabia’s lovers I alone —
Nor dazzled by the embroidery, nor lost
In the confusion of its night-dark folds,
Can hear the armed man speak.

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

Epilogue to "A Vision"

Midnight has come, and the great Christ Church Bell
And may a lesser bell sound through the room;
And it is All Souls' Night,
And two long glasses brimmed with muscatel
Bubble upon the table. A ghost may come;
For it is a ghost's right,
His element is so fine
Being sharpened by his death,
To drink from the wine-breath
While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.

I need some mind that, if the cannon sound
From every quarter of the world, can stay
Wound in mind's pondering
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound;
Because I have a marvellous thing to say,
A certain marvellous thing
None but the living mock,
Though not for sober ear;
It may be all that hear
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock.

Horton's the first I call. He loved strange thought
And knew that sweet extremity of pride
That's called platonic love,
And that to such a pitch of passion wrought

Nothing could bring him, when his lady died,
Anodyne for his love.
Words were but wasted breath;
One dear hope had he:
The inclemency
Of that or the next winter would be death.

Two thoughts were so mixed up I could not tell
Whether of her or God he thought the most,
But think that his mind's eye,
When upward turned, on one sole image fell;
And that a slight companionable ghost,
Wild with divinity,
Had so lit up the whole
Immense miraculous house
The Bible promised us,
It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a bowl.

On Florence Emery I call the next,
Who finding the first wrinkles on a face
Admired and beautiful,
And knowing that the future would be vexed
With 'minished beauty, multiplied commonplace,
preferred to teach a school
Away from neighbour or friend,
Among dark skins, and there
permit foul years to wear
Hidden from eyesight to the unnoticed end.

Before that end much had she ravelled out
From a discourse in figurative speech
By some learned Indian
On the soul's journey. How it is whirled about,
Wherever the orbit of the moon can reach,
Until it plunge into the sun;
And there, free and yet fast,
Being both Chance and Choice,
Forget its broken toys
And sink into its own delight at last.

And I call up MacGregor from the grave,
For in my first hard springtime we were friends.
Although of late estranged.
I thought him half a lunatic, half knave,
And told him so, but friendship never ends;
And what if mind seem changed,
And it seem changed with the mind,
When thoughts rise up unbid
On generous things that he did
And I grow half contented to be blind!

He had much industry at setting out,
Much boisterous courage, before loneliness
Had driven him crazed;
For meditations upon unknown thought
Make human intercourse grow less and less;
They are neither paid nor praised.
but he'd object to the host,

The glass because my glass;
A ghost-lover he was
And may have grown more arrogant being a ghost.

But names are nothing. What matter who it be,
So that his elements have grown so fine
The fume of muscatel
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy
No living man can drink from the whole wine.
I have mummy truths to tell
Whereat the living mock,
Though not for sober ear,
For maybe all that hear
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock.

Such thought — such thought have I that hold it tight
Till meditation master all its parts,
Nothing can stay my glance
Until that glance run in the world's despite
To where the damned have howled away their hearts,
And where the blessed dance;
Such thought, that in it bound
I need no other thing,
Wound in mind's wandering
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.

Oxford 1920

The Winding Stair and Other Poems

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The light of evening, Lissadell,
Great windows open to the south,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.
But a raving autumn shears
Blossom from the summer's wreath;
The older is condemned to death,
Pardoned, drags out lonely years
Conspiring among the ignorant.
I know not what the younger dreams -
Some vague Utopia - and she seems,
When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,
An image of such politics.
Many a time I think to seek
One or the other out and speak
Of that old Georgian mansion, mix
pictures of the mind, recall
That table and the talk of youth,
Two girls in silk kimonos, both
Beautiful, one a gazelle.

Dear shadows, now you know it all,
All the folly of a fight
With a common wrong or right.
The innocent and the beautiful.
Have no enemy but time;

Arise and bid me strike a match
And strike another till time catch;
Should the conflagration climb,
Run till all the sages know.
We the great gazebo built,
They convicted us of guilt;
Bid me strike a match and blow.

DEATH

NOR dread nor hope attend
A dying animal;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all;
Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone —
Man has created death.

A DIALOGUE OF SELF AND SOUL

My Soul I summon to the winding ancient stair;
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
'Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done:
Who can distinguish darkness from the soul
My Self. The consecretes blade upon my knees
Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
Unspotted by the centuries;
That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
From some court-lady's dress and round
The wodden scabbard bound and wound
Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn
My Soul. Why should the imagination of a man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war?
Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And interllect is wandering
To this and that and t'other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth.
My self. Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it
Five hundred years ago, about it lie
Flowers from I know not what embroidery —

Heart's purple — and all these I set
For emblems of the day against the tower
Emblematical of the night,
And claim as by a soldier's right
A charter to commit the crime once more.
My Soul. Such fullness in that quarter overflows
And falls into the basin of the mind
That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,
For intellect no longer knows
Is from the *Ought,* or *knower* from the *Known* —
That is to say, ascends to Heaven;
Only the dead can be forgiven;
But when I think of that my tongue's a stone.
My Self. A living man is blind and drinks his drop.
What matter if the ditches are impure?
What matter if I live it all once more?
Endure that toil of growing up;
The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
Of boyhood changing into man;
The unfinished man and his pain
Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;
The finished man among his enemies? —
How in the name of Heaven can he escape
That defiling and disfigured shape
The mirror of malicious eyes
Casts upon his eyes until at last
He thinks that shape must be his shape?
And what's the good of an escape

If honour find him in the wintry blast?
I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man battering blind men;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.
I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.

BLOOD AND THE MOON

BLESSED be this place,
More blessed still this tower;
A bloody, arrogant power
Rose out of the race
Uttering, mastering it,
Rose like these walls from these
Storm-beaten cottages —
In mockery I have set
A powerful emblem up,
And sing it rhyme upon rhyme
In mockery of a time
HaIf dead at the top.
Alexandria's was a beacon tower, and Babylon's
An image of the moving heavens, a log-book of the
sun's journey and the moon's;
And Shelley had his towers, thought's crowned powers
he called them once.
I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my
ancestral stair;
That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke
have travelled there.
Swift beating on his breast in sibylline frenzy blind
Because the heart in his blood-sodden breast had
dragged him down into mankind,
Goldsmith deliberately sipping at the honey-pot of his
mind,

And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,
That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century after century,
Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality;
And God-appointed Berkeley that proved all things a dream,
That this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world, its farrow that so solid seem,
Must vanish on the instant if the mind but change its theme;
Saeva Indignatio and the labourer's hire,
The strength that gives our blood and state magnanimity of its own desire;
Everything that is not God consumed with intellectual fire.

III

The purity of the unclouded moon
Has flung its atrowy shaft upon the floor.
Seven centuries have passed and it is pure,
The blood of innocence has left no stain.
There, on blood-saturated ground, have stood
Soldier, assassin, executioner.
Whether for daily pittance or in blind fear
Or out of abstract hatred, and shed blood,
But could not cast a single jet thereon.
Odour of blood on the ancestral stair!

And we that have shed none must gather there
And clamour in drunken frenzy for the moon.

IV

Upon the dusty, glittering windows cling,
And seem to cling upon the moonlit skies,
Tortoiseshell butterflies, peacock butterflies,
A couple of night-moths are on the wing.
Is every modern nation like the tower,
Half dead at the top? No matter what I said,
For wisdom is the property of the dead,
A something incompatible with life; and power,
Like everything that has the stain of blood,
A property of the living; but no stain
Can come upon the visage of the moon
When it has looked in glory from a cloud.

OIL AND BLOOD

IN tombs of gold and lapis lazuli
Bodies of holy men and women exude
Miraculous oil, odour of violet.
But under heavy loads of trampled clay
Lie bodies of the vampires full of blood;
Their shrouds are bloody and their lips are wet.

VERONICA'S NAPKIN

THE Heavenly Circuit; Berenice's Hair;
Tent-pole of Eden; the tent's drapery;
Symbolical glory of thc earth and air!
The Father and His angelic hierarchy
That made the magnitude and glory there
Stood in the circuit of a needle's eye.
Some found a different pole, and where it stood
A pattern on a napkin dipped in blood.

SYMBOLS

A STORM BEATEN old watch-tower,
A blind hermit rings the hour.
All-destroying sword-blade still
Carried by the wandering fool.
Gold-sewn silk on the sword-blade,
Beauty and fool together laid.

SPILT MILK

WE that have done and thought,
That have thought and done,
Must ramble, and thin out
Like milk spilt on a stone.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

THOUGH the great song return no more
There’s keen delight in what we have:
The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave.

STATISTICS

‘THOSE Platonists are a curse,’ he said,
‘God’s fire upon the wane,
A diagram hung there instead,
More women born than men.’

THREE MOVEMENTS

SHAKESPEAREAN fish swam the sea, far away from land;
Romantic fish swam in nets coming to the hand;
What are all those fish that lie gasping on the strand?

THE SEVEN SAGES

The First. My great-grandfather spoke to Edmund Burke
In Grattan's house.
The Second. My great-grandfather shared
A pot-house bench with Oliver Goldsmith once.
The Third. My great-grandfather's father talked of music,
Drank tar-water with the Bishop of Cloyne.
The Fourth. But mine saw Stella once.
The Fifth. Whence came our thought?
The Sixth. From four great minds that hated Whiggery.
The Fifth. Burke was a Whig.
The Sixth. Whether they knew or not,
Goldsmith and Burke, Swift and the Bishop of Cloyne
All hated Whiggery; but what is Whiggery?
A levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind
That never looked out of the eye of a saint
Or out of drunkard's eye.
The Seventh. All's Whiggery now,
But we old men are massed against the world.
The First. American colonies, Ireland, France and India
Harried, and Burke's great melody against it.
The Second. Oliver Goldsmith sang what he had seen,
Roads full of beggars, cattle in the fields,
But never saw the trefoil stained with blood,
The avenging leaf those fields raised up against it.
The Fourth. The tomb of Swift wears it away.
The Third. A voice
Soft as the rustle of a reed from Cloyne

That gathers volume; now a thunder-clap.
The Sixtb. What schooling had these four?
The Seventh. They walked the roads
Mimicking what they heard, as children mimic;
They understood that wisdom comes of beggary.

THE CRAZED MOON

CRAZED through much child-bearing
The moon is staggering in the sky;
Moon-struck by the despairing
Glances of her wandering eye
We grope, and grope in vain,
For children born of her pain.
Children dazed or dead!
When she in all her virginal pride
First trod on the mountain's head
What stir ran through the countryside
Where every foot obeyed her glance!
What manhood led the dance!
Fly-catchers of the moon,
Our hands are blenched, our fingers seem
But slender needles of bone;
Blenched by that malicious dream
They are spread wide that each
May rend what comes in reach.

COOLE PARK, 1929

I meditate upon a swallow's flight,
Upon a aged woman and her house,
A sycamore and lime-tree lost in night
Although that western cloud is luminous,
Great works constructed there in nature's spite
For scholars and for poets after us,
Thoughts long knitted into a single thought,
A dance-like glory that those walls begot.

There Hyde before he had beaten into prose
That noble blade the Muses buckled on,
There one that ruffled in a manly pose
For all his timid heart, there that slow man,
That meditative man, John Synge, and those
Impetuous men, Shawe-Taylor and Hugh Lane,
Found pride established in humility,
A scene well Set and excellent company.

They came like swallows and like swallows went,
And yet a woman's powerful character
Could keep a Swallow to its first intent;
And half a dozen in formation there,
That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,
Found certainty upon the dreaming air,
The intellectual sweetness of those lines
That cut through time or cross it withershins.

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand
When all those rooms and passages are gone,
When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound
And saplings root among the broken stone,
And dedicate - eyes bent upon the ground,
Back turned upon the brightness of the sun
And all the sensuality of the shade -
A moment’s memory to that laurelled head.

COOLE AND BALLYLEE, 1931

Under my window-ledge the waters race,
Otters below and moor-hens on the top,
Run for a mile undimmed in Heaven's face
Then darkening through 'dark' Raftery's 'cellar' drop,
Run underground, rise in a rocky place
In Coole demesne, and there to finish up
Spread to a lake and drop into a hole.
What's water but the generated soul?

Upon the border of that lake's a wood
Now all dry sticks under a wintry sun,
And in a copse of beeches there I stood,
For Nature's pulled her tragic buskin on
And all the rant's a mirror of my mood:
At sudden thunder of the mounting swan
I turned about and looked where branches break
The glittering reaches of the flooded lake.

Another emblem there! That stormy white
But seems a concentration of the sky;
And, like the soul, it sails into the sight
And in the morning's gone, no man knows why;
And is so lovely that it sets to right
What knowledge or its lack had set awry,
So atrogantly pure, a child might think
It can be murdered with a spot of ink.

Sound of a stick upon the floor, a sound
From somebody that toils from chair to chair;
Beloved books that famous hands have bound,
Old marble heads, old pictures everywhere;
Great rooms where travelled men and children found
Content or joy; a last inheritor
Where none has reigned that lacked a name and fame
Or out of folly into folly came.

A spot whereon the founders lived and died
Seemed once more dear than life; ancestral trees,
Or gardens rich in memory glorified
Marriages, alliances and families,
And every bride's ambition satisfied.
Where fashion or mere fantasy decrees
We shift about - all that great glory spent -
Like some poor Arab tribesman and his tent.

We were the last romantics - chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

FOR ANNE GREGORY

‘NEVER shall a young man,
Thrown into despair
By those great honey-coloured
Ramparts at your ear,
Love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair.’
‘But I can get a hair-dye
And set such colour there,
Brown, or black, or carrot,
That young men in despair
May love me for myself alone
And not my yellow hair.’
‘I heard an old religious man
But yesternight declare
That he had found a text to prove
That only God, my dear,
Could love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair.’

SWIFT'S EPITAPH

SWIFT has sailed into his rest;
Savage indignation there
Cannot lacerate his breast.
Imitate him if you dare,
World-besotted traveller; he
Served human liberty.

AT ALGECIRAS - A MEDITATON UPON DEATH

The heron-billed pale cattle-birds
That feed on some foul parasite
Of the Moroccan flocks and herds
Cross the narrow Straits to light
In the rich midnight of the garden trees
Till the dawn break upon those mingled seas.

Often at evening when a boy
Would I carry to a friend -
Hoping more substantial joy
Did an older mind commend -
Not such as are in Newton's metaphor,
But actual shells of Rosses' level shore.

Greater glory in the Sun,
An evening chill upon the air,
Bid imagination run
Much on the Great Questioner;
What He can question, what if questioned I
Can with a fitting confidence reply.

THE CHOICE

The intellect of man is forced to choose
perfection of the life, or of the work,
And if it take the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.
When all that story's finished, what's the news?
In luck or out the toil has left its mark:
That old perplexity an empty purse,
Or the day's vanity, the night's remorse.

MOHINI CHATTERJEE

I ASKED if I should pray.
But the Brahmin said,
‘pray for nothing, say
Every night in bed,
‘I have been a king,
I have been a slave,
Nor is there anything.
Fool, rascal, knave,
That I have not been,
And yet upon my breast
A myriad heads have lain.’”
That he might Set at rest
A boy’s turbulent days
Mohini Chatterjee
Spoke these, or words like these,
I add in commentary,
‘Old lovers yet may have
All that time denied —
Grave is heaped on grave
That they be satisfied —
Over the blackened earth
The old troops parade,
Birth is heaped on Birth
That such cannonade
May thunder time away,
Birth-hour and death-hour meet,

Or, as great sages say,
Men dance on deathless feet.’

BYZANTIUM

THE unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night walkers' song
After great cathedral gong;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.
Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path;
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;
I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.
Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miraclc than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.
At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,

Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.
Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
Spirit after Spirit! The smithies break the flood.
The golden smithies of the Emperor!
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

THE MOTHER OF GOD

THE threefold terror of love; a fallen flare
Through the hollow of an ear;
Wings beating about the room;
The terror of all terrors that I bore
The Heavens in my womb.
Had I not found content among the shows
Every common woman knows,
Chimney corner, garden walk,
Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes
And gather all the talk?
What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,
This fallen star my milk sustains,
This love that makes my heart's blood stop
Or strikes a Sudden chill into my bones
And bids my hair stand up?

VACILLATION

I

BETWEEN extremities
Man runs his course;
A brand, or flaming breath.
Comes to destroy
All those antinomies
Of day and night;
The body calls it death,
The heart remorse.
But if these be right
What is joy?

II

A tree there is that from its topmost bough
Is half all glittering flame and half all green
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;
And half is half and yet is all the scene;
And half and half consume what they renew,
And he that Attis' image hangs between
That staring fury and the blind lush leaf
May know not what he knows, but knows not grief

III

Get all the gold and silver that you can,
Satisfy ambition, animate
The trivial days and ram them with the sun,
And yet upon these maxims meditate:
All women dote upon an idle man

Although their children need a rich estate;
No man has ever lived that had enough
Of children's gratitude or woman's love.
No longer in Lethean foliage caught
Begin the preparation for your death
And from the fortieth winter by that thought
Test every work of intellect or faith,
And everything that your own hands have wrought
And call those works extravagance of breath
That are not suited for such men as come
proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.

IV

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.
While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.
Although the summer Sunlight gild
Cloudy leafage of the sky,
Or wintry moonlight sink the field
In storm-scattered intricacy,
I cannot look thereon,
Responsibility so weighs me down.

Things said or done long years ago,
Or things I did not do or say
But thought that I might say or do,
Weigh me down, and not a day
But something is recalled,
My conscience or my vanity appalled.
A rivery field spread out below,
An odour of the new-mown hay
In his nostrils, the great lord of Chou
Cried, casting off the mountain snow,
“Let all things pass away.’
Wheels by milk-white asses drawn
Where Babylon or Nineveh
Rose; some conquer drew rein
And cried to battle-weary men,
“Let all things pass away.’
From man’s blood-sodden heart are sprung
Those branches of the night and day
Where the gaudy moon is hung.
What’s the meaning of all song?
“Let all things pass away.’

VII

The Soul. Seek out reality, leave things that seem.
The Heart. What, be a singer born and lack a theme?
The Soul. Isaiah’s coal, what more can man desire?
The Heart. Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire!
The Soul. Look on that fire, salvation walks within.
The Heart. What theme had Homer but original sin?

VIII

Must we part, Von Hugel, though much alike, for we
Accept the miracles of the saints and honour sanctity?
The body of Saint Teresa lies undecayed in tomb,
Bathed in miraculous oil, sweet odours from it come,
Healing from its lettered slab. Those self-same hands perchance
Eternalised the body of a modern saint that once
Had scooped out pharaoh's mummy. I – though heart might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief
What seems most welcome in the tomb – play a pre destined part.
Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture said?
So get you gone, Von Hugel, though with blessings on
your head.

QUARREL IN OLD AGE

WHERE had her sweetness gone?
What fanatics invent
In this blind bitter town,
Fantasy or incident
Not worth thinking of,
put her in a rage.
I had forgiven enough
That had forgiven old age.
All lives that has lived;
So much is certain;
Old sages were not deceived:
Somewhere beyond the curtain
Of distorting days
Lives that lonely thing
That shone before these eyes
Targeted, trod like Spring.

THE RESULTS OF THOUGHT

ACQUAINTANCE; companion;
One dear brilliant woman;
The best-endowed, the elect,
All by their youth undone,
All, all, by that inhuman
Bitter glory wrecked.
But I have straightened out
Ruin, wreck and wrack;
I toiled long years and at length
Came to so deep a thought
I can summon back
All their wholesome strength.
What images are these
That turn dull-eyed away,
Or Shift Time's filthy load,
Straighten aged knees,
Hesitate or stay?
What heads shake or nod?

GRATITUDE TO THE UNKNOWN INSTRUCTORS

WHAT they undertook to do
They brought to pass;
All things hang like a drop of dew
Upon a blade of grass.

REMORSE FOR INTEMPERATE SPEECH

I RANTED to the knave and fool,
But outgrew that school,
Would transform the part,
Fit audience found, but cannot rule
My fanatic heart.
I sought my betters: though in each
Fine manners, liberal speech,
Turn hatred into sport,
Nothing said or done can reach
My fanatic heart,
Out of Ireland have we come.
Great hatred, little room,
Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother’s womb
A fanatic heart.

STREAM AND SUN AT GLENDALOUGH

THROUGH intricate motions ran
Stream and gliding sun
And all my heart seemed gay:
Some stupid thing that I had done
Made my attention stray.
Repentance keeps my heart impure;
But what am I that dare
Fancy that I can
Better conduct myself or have more
Sense than a common man?
What motion of the sun or stream
Or eyelid shot the gleam
That pierced my body through?
What made me live like these that seem
Self-born, born anew?

WORDS FOR MUSIC PERHAPS

I - CRAZY JANE AND THE BISHOP

BRING me to the blasted oak
That I, midnight upon the stroke,
(All find safety in the tomb.)
May call down curses on his head
Because of my dear Jack that's dead.
Coxcomb was the least he said:
The solid man and the coxcomb.
Nor was he Bishop when his ban
Banished Jack the Journeyman,
(All find safety in the tomb.)
Nor so much as parish priest,
Yet he, an old book in his fist,
Cried that we lived like beast and beast:
The solid man and the coxcomb.
The Bishop has a skin, God knows,
Wrinkled like the foot of a goose,
(All find safety in the tomb.)
Nor can he hide in holy black
The heron's hunch upon his back,
But a birch-tree stood my Jack:
The solid man and the coxcomb.
Jack had my virginity,
And bids me to the oak, for he
(all find safety in the tomb.)
Wanders out into the night

And there is shelter under it,
But should that other come, I spit:
The solid man and the coxcomb.

II - CRAZY JANE REPROVED

I CARE not what the sailors say:
All those dreadful thunder-stones,
All that storm that blots the day
Can but show that Heaven yawns;
Great Europa played the fool
That changed a lover for a bull.
Fol de rol, fol de rol.
To round that shell's elaborate whorl,
Adorning every secret track
With the delicate mother-of-pearl,
Made the joints of Heaven crack:
So never hang your heart upon
A roaring, ranting journeyman.
Fol de rol, fol de rol.

III - CRAZY JANE ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

'LOVE is all
Unsatisfied
That cannot take the whole
Body and soul';
And that is what Jane said.
'Take the sour
If you take me

I can scoff and lour
And scold for an hour.’
‘That’s certainly the case,’ said he.
‘Naked I lay,
The grass my bed;
Naked and hidden away,
That black day’;
And that is what Jane said.
‘What can be shown?
What true love be?
All could be known or shown
If Time were but gone.’
‘That’s certainly the case,’ said he.

IV - CRAZY JANE AND JACK THE JOURNEYMAN

I KNOW, although when looks meet
I tremble to the bone,
The more I leave the door unlatched
The sooner love is gone,
For love is but a skein unwound
Between the dark and dawn.
A lonely ghost the ghost is
That to God shall come;
I — love’s skein upon the ground,
My body in the tomb —
Shall leap into the light lost
In my mother’s womb.
But were I left to lie alone

In an empty bed,
The skein so bound us ghost to ghost
When he turned his head
passing on the road that night,
Mine must walk when dead.

V - CRAZY JANE ON GOD

THAT lover of a night
Came when he would,
Went in the dawning light
Whether I would or no;
Men come, men go;
All things remain in God.
Banners choke the sky;
Men-at-arms tread;
Armoured horses neigh
In the narrow pass:
All things remain in God.
Before their eyes a house
That from childhood stood
Uninhabited, ruinous,
Suddenly lit up
From door to top:
All things remain in God.
I had wild Jack for a lover;
Though like a road
That men pass over
My body makes no moan

But sings on:
All things remain in God.

VI - CRAZY JANE TALKS WITH THE BISHOP

I MET the Bishop on the road
And much said he and I.
‘Those breasts are flat and fallen now,
Those veins must soon be dry;
Live in a heavenly mansion,
Not in some foul sty.’
‘Fair and foul are near of kin,
And fair needs foul,’ I cried.
‘My friends are gone, but that’s a truth
Nor grave nor bed denied,
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart’s pride.
‘A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.’

VII - CRAZY JANE GROWN OLD LOOKS AT THE DANCERS

I FOUND that ivory image there
Dancing with her chosen youth,
But when he wound her coal-black hair
As though to strangle her, no scream

Or bodily movement did I dare,
Eyes under eyelids did so gleam;
Love is like the lion's tooth.
When She, and though some said she played
I said that she had danced heart's truth,
Drew a knife to strike him dead,
I could but leave him to his fate;
For no matter what is said
They had all that had their hate;
Love is like the lion's tooth.
Did he die or did she die?
Seemed to die or died they both?
God be with the times when I
Cared not a thraneen for what chanced
So that I had the limbs to try
Such a dance as there was danced —
Love is like the lion's tooth.

VIII - GIRL'S SONG

I WENT out alone
To sing a song or two,
My fancy on a man,
And you know who.
Another came in sight
That on a stick relied
To hold himself upright;
I sat and cried.
And that was all my song —

When everything is told,
Saw I an old man young
Or young man old?

IX - YOUNG MAN'S SONG

'SHE will change,' I cried.
'Into a withered crone.'
The heart in my side,
That so still had lain,
In noble rage replied
And beat upon the bone:
'Uplift those eyes and throw
Those glances unafraid:
She would as bravely show
Did all the fabric fade;
No withered crone I saw
Before the world was made.'
Abashed by that report,
For the heart cannot lie,
I knelt in the dirt.
And all shall bend the knee
To my offended heart
Until it pardon me.

X - HER ANXIETY

EARTH in beauty dressed
Awaits returning spring.
All true love must die,

Alter at the best
Into some lesser thing.
Prove that I lie.
Such body lovers have,
Such exacting breath,
That they touch or sigh.
Every touch they give,
Love is nearer death.
Prove that I lie.

XI - HIS CONFIDENCE

UNDYING love to buy
I wrote upon
The corners of this eye
All wrongs done.
What payment were enough
For undying love?
I broke my heart in two
So hard I struck.
What matter? for I know
That out of rock,
Out of a desolate source,
Love leaps upon its course.

XII - LOVE'S LONELINESS

OLD fathers, great-grandfathers,
Rise as kindred should.
If ever lover's loneliness

Came where you stood,
Pray that Heaven protect us
That protect your blood.
The mountain throws a shadow,
Thin is the moon's horn;
What did we remember
Under the ragged thorn?
Dread has followed longing,
And our hearts are torn.

XIII - HER DREAM

I DREAMED as in my bed I lay,
All night's fathomless wisdom come,
That I had shorn my locks away
And laid them on Love's lettered tomb:
But something bore them out of sight
In a great tumult of the air,
And after nailed upon the night
Berenice's burning hair.

XIV - HIS BARGAIN

WHO talks of Plato's spindle;
What set it whirling round?
Eternity may dwindle,
Time is unwound,
Dan and Jerry Lout
Change their loves about.
However they may take it,

Before the thread began
I made, and may not break it
When the last thread has run,
A bargain with that hair
And all the windings there.

XV - THREE THINGS

‘O CRUEL Death, give three things back,’
Sang a bone upon the shore;
‘A child found all a child can lack,
Whether of pleasure or of rest,
Upon the abundance of my breast’:
A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.
‘Three dear things that women know,’
Sang a bhone upon the shore;
‘A man if I but held him so
When my body was alive
Found all the pleasure that life gave’:
A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.
‘The third thing that I think of yet,’
Sang a bone upon the shore,
‘Is that morning when I met
Face to face my rightful man
And did after stretch and yawn’:
A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.

XVI - LULLABY

BELOVED, may your sleep be sound
That have found it where you fed.
What were all the world's alarms
To mighty paris when he found
Sleep upon a golden bed
That first dawn in Helen's arms?
Sleep, beloved, such a sleep
As did that wild Tristram know
When, the potion's work being done,
Roe could run or doe could leap
Under oak and beechen bough,
Roe could leap or doe could run;
Such a sleep and sound as fell
Upon Eurotas' grassy bank
When the holy bird, that there
Accomplished his predestined will,
From the limbs of Leda sank
But not from her protecting care.

XVII - AFTER LONG SILENCE

SPEECH after long silence; it is right,
All other lovers being estranged or dead,
Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,
The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,
That we descant and yet again descant
Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song:
Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young
We loved each other and were ignorant.

XVIII - MAD AS THE MIST AND SNOW

BOLT and bar the shutter,
For the foul winds blow:
Our minds are at their best this night,
And I seem to know
That everything outside us is
Mad as the mist and snow.
Horace there by Homer stands,
Plato stands below,
And here is Tully's open page.
How many years ago
Were you and I unlettered lads
Mad as the mist and snow?
You ask what makes me sigh, old friend,
What makes me shudder so?
I shudder and I sigh to think
That even Cicero
And many-minded Homer were
Mad as the mist and snow.

XIX - THOSE DANCING DAYS ARE GONE

COME, let me sing into your ear;
Those dancing days are gone,
All that silk and satin gear;
Crouch upon a stone,
Wrapping that foul body up
In as foul a rag:

I carry the sun in a golden cup.
The moon in a silver bag.
Curse as you may I sing it through;
What matter if the knave
That the most could pleasure you,
The children that he gave,
Are somewhere sleeping like a top
Under a marble flag?
I carry the sun in a golden cup.
The moon in a silver bag.
I thought it out this very day.
Noon upon the clock,
A man may put pretence away
Who leans upon a stick,
May sing, and sing until he drop,
Whether to maid or hag:
I carry the sun in a golden cup,
The moon in a silver bag.

XX - ‘I AM OF IRELAND’

AM of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,’ cried she.
‘Come out of charity,
Come dance with me in Ireland.’
One man, one man alone
In that outlandish gear,
One solitary man

Of all that rambled there
Had turned his stately head.
That is a long way off,
And time runs on,' he said,
'And the night grows rough.'
I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
'Come out of charity
And dance with me in Ireland.'
The fiddlers are all thumbs,
Or the fiddle-string accursed,
The drums and the kettledrums
And the trumpets all are burst,
And the trombone,' cried he,
'The trumpet and trombone,'
And cocked a malicious eye,
'But time runs on, runs on.'
I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
'Come out of charity
And dance with me in Ireland.'

XXI - THE DANCER AT CRUACHAN AND CRO-PATRICK

I, PROCLAIMING that there is
Among birds or beasts or men
One that is perfect or at peace.

Danced on Cruachan’s windy plain,
Upon Cro-patrick sang aloud;
All that could run or leap or swim
Whether in wood, water or cloud,
Acclaiming, proclaiming, declaiming Him.

XXII - TOM THE LUNATIC

SANG old Tom the lunatic
That sleeps under the canopy:
‘What change has put my thoughts astray
And eyes that had s-o keen a sight?
What has turned to smoking wick
Nature’s pure unchanging light?
‘Huddon and Duddon and Daniel O’Leary.
Holy Joe, the beggar-man,
Wenching, drinking, still remain
Or sing a penance on the road;
Something made these eyeballs weary
That blinked and saw them in a shroud.
‘Whatever stands in field or flood,
Bird, beast, fish or man,
Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
Stands in God’s unchanging eye
In all the vigour of its blood;
In that faith I live or die.’

XXIII - TOM AT CRUACHAN

ON Cruachan's plain slept he
That must sing in a rhyme
What most could shake his soul:
'The stallion Eternit
Mounted the mare of Time,
'Gat the foal of the world.'

XXIV - OLD TOM AGAIN

THINGS out of perfection sail,
And all their swelling canvas wear,
Nor shall the self-begotten fail
Though fantastic men suppose
Building-yard and stormy shore,
Winding-sheet and swaddling — clothes.

XXV - THE DELPHIC ORACLE UPON PLOTINUS

BEHOLD that great Plotinus swim,
Buffeted by such seas;
Bland Rhadamanthus beckons him,
But the Golden Race looks dim,
Salt blood blocks his eyes.
Scattered on the level grass
Or winding through the grove
plato there and Minos pass,
There stately Pythagoras
And all the choir of Love.

A WOMAN YOUNG AND OLD

I

FATHER AND CHILD

SHE hears me strike the board and say
That she is under ban
Of all good men and women,
Being mentioned with a man
That has the worst of all bad names;
And thereupon replies
That his hair is beautiful,
Cold as the March wind his eyes.

II

BEFORE THE WORLD WAS MADE

IF I make the lashes dark
And the eyes more bright
And the lips more scarlet,
Or ask if all be right
From mirror after mirror,
No vanity's displayed:
I'm looking for the face I had
Before the world was made.
What if I look upon a man
As though on my beloved,
And my blood be cold the while
And my heart unmoved?
Why should he think me cruel

Or that he is betrayed?
I'd have him love the thing that was
Before the world was made.

III
A FIRST CONFESSION

I ADMIT the briar
Entangled in my hair
Did not injure me;
My blenching and trembling,
Nothing but dissembling,
Nothing but coquetry.
I long for truth, and yet
I cannot stay from that
My better self disowns,
For a man's attention
Brings such satisfaction
To the craving in my bones.
Brightness that I pull back
From the Zodiac,
Why those questioning eyes
That are fixed upon me?
What can they do but shun me
If empty night replies?

IV
HER TRIUMPH

I DID the dragon's will until you came
Because I had fancied love a casual
Improvisation, or a settled game
That followed if I let the kerchief fall:
Those deeds were best that gave the minute wings
And heavenly music if they gave it wit;
And then you stood among the dragon-rings.
I mocked, being crazy, but you mastered it
And broke the chain and set my ankles free,
Saint George or else a pagan Perseus;
And now we stare astonished at the sea,
And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.

V
CONSOLATION

O BUT there is wisdom
In what the sages said;
But stretch that body for a while
And lay down that head
Till I have told the sages
Where man is comforted.
How could passion run so deep
Had I never thought
That the crime of being born
Blackens all our lot?
But where the crime's committed
The crime can be forgot.

VI
CHOSEN

THE lot of love is chosen. I learnt that much
Struggling for an image on the track
Of the whirling Zodiac.
Scarce did he my body touch,
Scarce sank he from the west
Or found a subtetranean rest
On the maternal midnight of my breast
Before I had marked him on his northern way,
And seemed to stand although in bed I lay.
I struggled with the horror of daybreak,
I chose it for my lot! If questioned on
My utmost pleasure with a man
By some new-married bride, I take
That stillness for a theme
Where his heart my heart did seem
And both adrift on the miraculous stream
Where — wrote a learned astrologer —
The Zodiac is changed into a sphere.

VII
PARTING

He. Dear, I must be gone
While night Shuts the eyes
Of the household spies;
That song announces dawn.

She. No, night's bird and love's
Bids all true lovers rest,
While his loud song reproves
The murderous stealth of day.
He. Daylight already flies
From mountain crest to crest
She. That light is from the moom.
He. That bird...
She. Let him sing on,
I offer to love's play
My dark declivities.

VIII
HER VISION IN THE WOOD

DRY timber under that rich foliage,
At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood,
Too old for a man's love I stood in rage
Imagining men. Imagining that I could
A greater with a lesser pang assuage
Or but to find if withered vein ran blood,
I tore my body that its wine might cover
Whatever could rccall the lip of lover.
And after that I held my fingers up,
Stared at the wine-dark nail, or dark that ran
Down every withered finger from the top;
But the dark changed to red, and torches shone,
And deafening music shook the leaves; a troop
Shouldered a litter with a wounded man,

Or smote upon the string and to the sound
Sang of the beast that gave the fatal wound.
All stately women moving to a song
With loosened hair or foreheads grief-distraught,
It seemed a Quattrocento painter's throng,
A thoughtless image of Mantegna's thought —
Why should they think that are for ever young?
Till suddenly in grief's contagion caught,
I stared upon his blood-bedabbled breast
And sang my malediction with the rest.
That thing all blood and mire, that beast-torn wreck,
Half turned and fixed a glazing eye on mine,
And, though love's bitter-sweet had all come back,
Those bodies from a picture or a coin
Nor saw my body fall nor heard it shriek,
Nor knew, drunken with singing as with wine,
That they had brought no fabulous symbol there
But my heart's victim and its torturer.

IX
A LAST CONFESSION

WHAT lively lad most pleasured me
Of all that with me lay?
I answer that I gave my soul
And loved in misery,
But had great pleasure with a lad
That I loved bodily.
Flinging from his arms I laughed

To think his passion such
He fancied that I gave a soul
Did but our bodies touch,
And laughed upon his breast to think
Beast gave beast as much.
I gave what other women gave
‘That stepped out of their clothes.
But when this soul, its body off,
Naked to naked goes,
He it has found shall find therein
What none other knows,
And give his own and take his own
And rule in his own right;
And though it loved in misery
Close and cling so tight,
There’s not a bird of day that dare
Extinguish that delight.

X
MEETING

HIDDEN by old age awhile
In masker’s cloak and hood,
Each hating what the other loved,
Face to face we stood:
‘That I have met with such,’ said he,
‘Bodes me little good.’
‘Let others boast their fill,’ said I,
‘But never dare to boast

That such as I had such a man
For lover in the past;
Say that of living men I hate
Such a man the most.'
'A loony'd boast of such a love,'
He in his rage declared:
But such as he for such as me —
Could we both discard
This beggarly habiliment —
Had found a sweeter word.

XI
FROM THE 'ANTIGONE'

OVERCOME — O bitter sweetness,
Inhabitant of the soft cheek of a girl —
The rich man and his affairs,
The fat flocks and the fields' fatness,
Mariners, rough harvesters;
Overcome Gods upon Parnassus;
Overcome the Empyrean; hurl
Heaven and Earth out of their places,
That in the Same calamity
Brother and brother, friend and friend,
Family and family,
City and city may contend,
By that great glory driven wild.
Pray I will and sing I must,

And yet I weep — Oedipus' child
Descends into the loveless dust.

Parnell’s Funeral and Other Poems

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PARNELL'S FUNERAL

I

Under the Great Comedian's tomb the crowd.
A bundle of tempestuous cloud is blown
About the sky; where that is clear of cloud
Brightness remains; a brighter star shoots down;
What shudders run through all that animal blood?
What is this sacrifice? Can someone there
Recall the Cretan barb that pierced a star?

Rich foliage that the starlight glittered through,
A frenzied crowd, and where the branches sprang
A beautiful seated boy; a sacred bow;
A woman, and an arrow on a string;
A pierced boy, image of a star laid low.
That woman, the Great Mother imaging,
Cut out his heart. Some master of design
Stamped boy and tree upon Sicilian coin.

An age is the reversal of an age:
When strangers murdered Emmet, Fitzgerald, Tone,
We lived like men that watch a painted stage.
What matter for the scene, the scene once gone:
It had not touched our lives. But popular rage,
Hysterica passio dragged this quarry down.
None shared our guilt; nor did we play a part
Upon a painted stage when we devoured his heart.

Come, fix upon me that accusing eye.
I thirst for accusation. All that was sung.
All that was said in Ireland is a lie
Bred out of the c-ontagion of the throng,
Saving the rhyme rats hear before they die.
Leave nothing but the nothingS that belong
To this bare soul, let all men judge that can
Whether it be an animal or a man.

II

The rest I pass, one sentence I unsay.
Had de Valera eaten parnell's heart
No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day.
No civil rancour torn the land apart.

Had Cosgrave eaten parnell's heart, the land's
Imagination had been satisfied,
Or lacking that, government in such hands.
O'Higgins its sole statesman had not died.

Had even O'Duffy - but I name no more -
Their school a crowd, his master solitude;
Through Jonathan Swift's clark grove he passed, and there
plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.

ALTERNATIVE SONG FOR THE SEVERED HEAD IN "THE KING OF THE GREAT CLOCK TOWER"

SADDLE and ride, I heard a man say,
Out of Ben Bulben and Knocknarea,
What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
All those tragic characters ride
But turn from Rosses' crawling tide,
The meet's upon the mountain-side.
A slow low note and an iron bell.
What brought them there so far from their home.
Cuchulain that fought night long with the foam,
What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
Niamh that rode on it; lad and lass
That sat so still and played at the chess?
What but heroic wantonness?
A slow low note and an iron bell.
Aleel, his Countess; Hanrahan
That seemed but a wild wenching man;
What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
And all alone comes riding there
The King that could make his people stare,
Because he had feathers instead of hair.
A slow low note and an iron bell.

TWO SONGS REWRITTEN FOR THE TUNE'S SAKE

I

My Paistin Finn is my sole desire,
And I am shrunken to skin and bone,
For all my heart has had for its hire
Is what I can whistle alone and alone.
Oro, oro.!
Tomorrow night I will break down the door.
What is the good of a man and he
Alone and alone, with a speckled shin?
I would that I drank with my love on my knee
Between two barrels at the inn.
Oro, oro.!

To-morrow night I will break down the door.
Alone and alone nine nights I lay
Between two bushes under the rain;
I thought to have whistled her down that
I whistled and whistled and whistled in vain.
Oro, oro!
To-morrow night I will break down the door.

II

I would that I were an old beggar
Rolling a blind pearl eye,
For he cannot see my lady
Go gallivanting by;
A dreary, dreepy beggar
Without a friend on the earth

But a thieving rascally cur —
O a beggar blind from his birth;
Or anything else but a rhymer
Without a thing in his head
But rhymes for a beautiful lady,
He rhyming alone in his bed.

A PRAYER FOR OLD AGE

GOD guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone;
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone;
From all that makes a wise old man
That can be praised of all;
O what am I that I should not seem
For the song's sake a fool?
I pray — for word is out
And prayer comes round again —
That I may seem, though I die old,
A foolish, passionate man.

CHURCH AND STATE

HERE is fresh matter, poet,
Matter for old age meet;
Might of the Church and the State,
Their mobs put under their feet.
O but heart's wine shall run pure,
Mind's bread grow sweet.
That were a cowardly song,
Wander in dreams no more;
What if the Church and the State
Are the mob that howls at the door!
Wine shall run thick to the end,
Bread taste sour.

SUPERNATURAL SONGS

I

RIBB AT THE TOMB OF BAILE AND AILLINN

BECAUSE you have found me in the pitch-dark night
With open book you ask me what I do.
Mark and digest my tale, carry it afar
To those that never saw this tonsured head
Nor heard this voice that ninety years have cracked.
Of Baile and Aillinn you need not speak,
All know their tale, all know what leaf and twig,
What juncture of the apple and the yew,
Surmount their bones; but speak what none ha've
heard.
The miracle that gave them such a death
Transfigured to pure substance what had once
Been bone and sinew; when such bodies join
There is no touching here, nor touching there,
Nor straining joy, but whole is joined to whole;
For the intercourse of angels is a light
Where for its moment both seem lost, consumed.
Here in the pitch-dark atmosphere above
The trembling of the apple and the yew,
Here on the anniversary of their death,
The anniversary of their first embrace,
Those lovers, purified by tragedy,
Hurry into each other's arms; these eyes,
By water, herb and solitary prayer
Made aquiline, are open to that light.
Though somewhat broken by the leaves, that light

Lies in a circle on the grass; therein
I turn the pages of my holy book.

II

RIBB DENOUNCES PATRICK

An abstract Greek absurdity has crazed the man —
Recall that masculine Trinity. Man, woman, child (a
daughter or a son),
That's how all natural or supernatural stories run.
Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are
wed.
As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets, Godhead
begets Godhead,
For things below are copies, the Great Smaragdine
Tablet said.
Yet all must copy copies, all increase their kind;
When the conflagration of their passion sinks, damped
by the body or the mind,
That juggling nature mounts, her coil in their em-
braces twined.
The mirror-scaled serpent is multiplicity,
But all that run in couples, on earth, in flood or air,
share God that is but three,
And could beget or bear themselves could they but
love as He.

III

RIBB IN ECSTASY

What matter that you understood no word!
Doubtless I spoke or sang what I had heard
In broken sentences. My soul had found
All happiness in its own cause or ground.
Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm begot
Godhead. Some shadow fell. My soul forgot
Those amorous cries that out of quiet come
And must the common round of day resume.

IV

THERE

There all the barrel-hoops are knit,
There all the serpent-tails are bit,
There all the gyres converge in one,
There all the planets drop in the Sun.

V

RIBB CONSIDERS CHRISTIAN LOVE INSUFFICIEN

Why should I seek for love or study it?
It is of God and passes human wit.
I study hatred with great diligence,
For that's a passion in my own control,
A sort of besom that can clear the soul
Of everything that is not mind or sense.
Why do I hate man, woman Or event?
That is a light my jealous soul has sent.
From terror and deception freed it can
Discover impurities, can show at last
How soul may walk when all such things are past,
How soul could walk before such things began.
Then my delivered soul herself shall learn
A darker knowledge and in hatred turn
From every thought of God mankind has had.
Thought is a garment and the soul's a bride
That cannot in that trash and tinsel hide:
Hatred of God may bring the soul to God.
At stroke of midnight soul cannot endure
A bodily or mental furniture.
What can she take until her Master give!
Where can she look until He make the show!
What can she know until He bid her know!
How can she live till in her blood He live!

HE AND SHE

As the moon sidles up
Must she sidle up,
As trips the scared moon
Away must she trip:
‘His light had struck me blind
Dared I stop’.
She sings as the moon sings:
‘I am I, am I;
The greater grows my light
The further that I fly’.
All creation shivers
With that sweet cry

VII

WHAT MAGIC DRUM?

He holds him from desire, all but stops his breathing lest
primordial Motherhood forsake his limbs, the child no longer rest,
Drinking joy as it were milk upon his breast.
Through light-obliterating garden foliage what magic drum?
Down limb and breast or down that glimmering belly move his mouth and sinewy tongue.
What from the forest came? What beast has licked its young?

VIII

WHENCE HAD THEY COME?

Eternity is passion, girl or boy
Cry at the onset of their sexual joy
‘For ever and for ever’; then awake
Ignorant what Dramatis personae spake;
A passion-driven exultant man sings out
Sentences that he has never thought;
The Flagellant lashes those submissive loins
Ignorant what that dramatist enjoins,
What master made the lash. Whence had they come,
The hand and lash that beat down frigid Rome?
What sacred drama through her body heaved
When world-transforming Charlemagne was con-
ceived?

IX

THE FOUR AGES OF MAN

He with body waged a fight,
But body won; it walks upright.
Then he struggled with the heart;
Innocence and peace depart.
Then he struggled with the mind;
His proud heart he left behind.
Now his wars on God begin;
At stroke of midnight God shall win.

X

CONJUNCTIONS

If Jupiter and Saturn meet,
What a cop of mummy wheat!
The sword’s a cross; thereon He died:
On breast of Mars the goddess sighed.

XI

A NEEDLE'S EYE

All the stream that's roaring by
Came out of a needle's eye;
Things unborn, things that are gone,
From needle's eye still goad it on.

XII

MERU

Civilisation is hooped together, brought
Under a mle, under the semblance of peace
By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
Ravening through century after century,
Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come
Into the desolation of reality:
Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!
Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest,
Caverned in night under the drifted snow,
Or where that snow and winter's dreadful blast
Beat down upon their naked bodies, know
That day brings round the night, that before dawn
His glory and his monuments are gone.

New Poems, 1938

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THE GYRES

THE GYRES! the gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth;
Things thought too long can be no longer thought,
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out.
Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
Empedocles has thrown all things about;
Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.
What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,
And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,
A-greater, a more gracious time has gone;
For painted forms or boxes of make-up
In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
What matter? Out of cavern comes a voice,
And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice!'
Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul,
What matter? Those that Rocky Face holds dear,
Lovers of horses and of women, shall,
From marble of a broken sepulchre,
Or dark betwixt the polecat and the owl,
Or any rich, dark nothing disinter
The workman, noble and saint, and all things run
On that unfashionable gyre again.

LAPIS LAZULI

(For Harry Clifton)

I HAVE heard that hysterical women say
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow.
Of poets that are always gay,
For everybody knows or else should know
That if nothing drastic is done
Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out.
Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
Until the town lie beaten flat.

All perform their tragic play,
There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
Yet they, should the last scene be there,
The great stage curtain about to drop,
If worthy their prominent part in the play,
Do not break up their lines to weep.
They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.
All men have aimed at, found and lost;
Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop-scenes drop at once
Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

On their own feet they came, or On shipboard,'
Camel-back; horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,
Old civilisations put to the sword.
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus,
Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp-chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay.

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
Are carved in lapis lazuli,
Over them flies a long-legged bird,
A symbol of longevity;
The third, doubtless a serving-man,
Carries a musical instmment.

Every discoloration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,

On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.

IMITATED FROM THE JAPANESE

A MOST astonishing thing —
Seventy years have I lived;

(Hurrah for the flowers of Spring,
For Spring is here again.)

Seventy years have I lived
No ragged beggar-man,
Seventy years have I lived,
Seventy years man and boy,
And never have I danced for joy.

SWEET DANCER

THE girl goes dancing there
On the leaf-sown, new-mown, smooth
Grass plot of the garden;
Escaped from bitter youth,
Escaped out of her crowd,
Or out of her black cloud.
Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer.!

If strange men come from the house
To lead her away, do not say
That she is happy being crazy;
Lead them gently astray;
Let her finish her dance,
Let her finish her dance.
Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer.!

THE THREE BUSHES

SAID lady once to lover,
‘None can rely upon
A love that lacks its proper food;
And if your love were gone
How could you sing those songs of love?
I should be blamed, young man.
O my dear, O my dear.

Have no lit candles in your room,’
That lovely lady said,
‘That I at midnight by the clock
May creep into your bed,
For if I saw myself creep in
I think I should drop dead.’
O my dear, O my dear.

‘I love a man in secret,
Dear chambermaid,’ said she.
‘I know that I must drop down dead
If he stop loving me,
Yet what could I but drop down dead
If I lost my chastity?
O my dear, O my dear.

‘So you must lie beside him
And let him think me there.
And maybe we are all the same
Where no candles are,

And maybe we are all the same
That stip the body bare.’
O my dear, O my dear.
But no dogs barked, and midnights chimed,
And through the chime she’d say,
‘That was a lucky thought of mine,
My lover. looked so gay’;
But heaved a sigh if the chambermaid
Looked half asleep all day.
O my dear, O my dear.

‘No, not another song,’ siid he,
‘Because my lady came
A year ago for the first time
At midnight to my room,
And I must lie between the sheets
When the clock begins to chime.’
O my dear, O my d-ear.

‘A laughing, crying, sacred song,
A leching song,’ they said.
Did ever men hear such a song?
No, but that day they did.
Did ever man ride such a race?
No, not until he rode.
O my dear, O my dear.

But when his horse had put its hoof
Into a rabbit-hole

He dropped upon his head and died.
His lady saw it all
And dropped and died thereon, for she
Loved him with her soul.
O my dear, O my dear.
The chambermaid lived long, and took
Their graves into her charge,
And there two bushes planted
That when they had grown large
Seemed sprung from but a single root
So did their roses merge.
O my dear, O my dear.

When she was old and dying,
The priest came where she was;
She made a full confession.
Long looked he in her face,
And O he was a good man
And understood her case.
O my dear, O my dear.

He bade them take and bury her
Beside her lady's man,
And set a rose-tree on her grave,
And now none living can,
When they have plucked a rose there,
Know where its roots began.
O my dear, O my dear.

THE LADY'S FIRST SONG

I TURN round
Like a dumb beast in a show.
Neither know what I am
Nor where I go,
My language beaten
Into one name;
I am in love
And that is my shame.
What hurts the soul
My soul adores,
No better than a beast
Upon all fours.

THE LADY'S SECOND SONG

WHAT sort of man is coming
To lie between your feet?
What matter, we are but women.
Wash; make your body sweet;
I have cupboards of dried fragrance.
I can strew the sheet.
The Lord have mercy upon us.

He shall love my soul as though
Body were not at all,
He shall love your body
Untroubled by the soul,
Love cram love's two divisions
Yet keep his substance whole.
The Lord have mercy upon us.

Soul must learn a love that is
proper to my breast,
Limbs a Love in common
With every noble beast.
If soul may look and body touch,
Which is the more blest?
The Lord have mercy upon us.

THE LADY'S THIRD SONG

WHEN you and my true lover meet
And he plays tunes between your feet.
Speak no evil of the soul,
Nor think that body is the whole,
For I that am his daylight lady
Know worse evil of the body;
But in honour split his love
Till either neither have enough,
That I may hear if we should kiss
A contrapuntal serpent hiss,
You, should hand explore a thigh,
All the labouring heavens sigh.

THE LOVER'S SONG

BIRD sighs for the air,
Thought for I know not where,
For the womb the seed sighs.
Now sinks the same rest
On mind, on nest,
On straining thighs.

THE CHAMBERMAID'S FIRST SONG

HOW came this ranger
Now sunk in rest,
Stranger with strangcr.
On my cold breast?
What's left to Sigh for?
Strange night has come;
God's love has hidden him
Out of all harm,
Pleasure has made him
Weak as a worm.

THE CHAMBERMAID’S SECOND SONG

From pleasure of the bed,
Dull as a worm,
His rod and its butting head
Limp as a worm,
His spirit that has fled
Blind as a worm.

AN ACRE OF GRASS

PICTURE and book remain,
An acre of green grass
For air and exercise,
Now strength of body goes;
Midnight, an old house
Where nothing stirs but a mouse.

My temptation is quiet.
Here at life's end
Neither loose imagination,
Nor the mill of the mind
Consuming its rag and bone,
Can make the truth known.

Grant me an old man's frenzy,
Myself must I remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till Truth obeyed his call;

A mind Michael Angelo knew
That can pierce the clouds,
Or inspired by frenzy
Shake the dead in their shrouds;
Forgotten else by mankind,
An old man's eagle mind.

WHAT THEN?

His chosen comrades thought at school
He must grow a famous man;
He thought the same and lived by rule,
All his twenties crammed with toil;
‘What then?’ sang Plato’s ghost. ‘What then?’

Everything he wrote was read,
After certain years he won
Sufficient money for his need,
Friends that have been friends indeed;
‘What then?’ sang Plato’s ghost. ‘ What then?’

All his happier dreams came true -
A small old house, wife, daughter, son,
Grounds where plum and cabbage grew,
poets and Wits about him drew;
‘What then.?’ sang Plato’s ghost. ‘What then?’

The work is done,’ grown old he thought,
‘According to my boyish plan;
Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
Something to perfection brought’;
But louder sang that ghost, ‘What then?’

BEAUTIFUL LOFTY THINGS

BEAUTIFUL lofty things: O'Leary's noble head;
My father upon the Abbey stage, before him a raging crowd:
'This Land of Saints,' and then as the applause died out,
'Of plaster Saints'; his beautiful mischievous head thrown back.
Standish O'Grady supporting himself between the tables
Speaking to a drunken audience high nonsensical words;
Augusta Gregory seated at her great ormolu table,
Her eightieth winter approaching: 'Yesterday he threatened my life.
I told him that nightly from six to seven I sat at this table,
The blinds drawn up'; Maud Gonne at Howth station waiting a train,
Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head:
All the Olympians; a thing never known again.

A CRAZED GIRL

THAT crazed girl improvising her music.
Her poetry, dancing upon the shore,

Her soul in division from itself
Climbing, falling She knew not where,
Hiding amid the cargo of a steamship,
Her knee-cap broken, that girl I declare
A beautiful lofty thing, or a thing
Heroically lost, heroically found.

No matter what disaster occurred
She stood in desperate music wound,
Wound, wound, and she made in her triumph
Where the bales and the baskets lay
No common intelligible sound
But sang, ‘O sea-starved, hungry sea.’

TO DOROTHY WELLESLEY

STRETCH towards the moonless midnight of the trees,
As though that hand could reach to where they stand,
And they but famous old upholsteries
Delightful to the touch; tighten that hand
As though to draw them closer yet.
Rammed full
Of that most sensuous silence of the night
(For since the horizon's bought strange dogs are still)
Climb to your chamber full of books and wait,
No books upon the knee, and no one there
But a Great Dane that cannot bay the moon
And now lies sunk in sleep.
What climbs the stair?
Nothing that common women ponder on
If you are worrh my hope! Neither Content
Nor satisfied Conscience, but that great family
Some ancient famous authors mistepresent,
The proud Furies each with her torch on high.

THE CURSE OF CROMWELL

YOU ask what — I have found, and far and wide I go:
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous crew,
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen, where are they?
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride — -
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified.
O what of that, O what of that,
'What is there left to say?

All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,
But there's no good complaining, for money's rant is on.
He that's mounting up must on his neighbour mount,
And we and all the Muses are things of no account.
They have schooling of their own, but I pass their schooling by,
What can they know that we know that know the time to die?
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

But there's another knowledge that my heart destroys,
As the fox in the old fable destroyed the Spartan boy's
Because it proves that things both can and cannot be;
That the swordsmen and the ladies can still keep company,
Can pay the poet for a verse and hear the fiddle sound,
That I am still their setvant though all are underground.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?
I came on a great house in the middle of the night,
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,

And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
But I woke in an old ruin that the winds. howled through;
And when I pay attention I must out and walk
Among the dogs and horses that understand my talk.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

ROGER CASEMENT

After reading 'The Forged Casement Diaries' by Dr. Maloney

I say that Roger Casement
Did what he had to do.
He died upon the gallows,
But that is nothing new.
Afraid they might be beaten
Before the bench of Time,
They turned a trick by forgery
And blackened his good name.
A perjurer stood ready
To prove their forgery true;
They gave it out to all the world,
And that is something new;
For Spring Rice had to whisper it,
Being their Ambassador,
And then the speakers got it
And writers by the score.
Come Tom and Dick, come all the troop
That cried it far and wide,
Come from the forger and his desk,
Desert the perjurer's side;
Come speak your bit in public
That some amends be made
To this most gallant gentleman
That is in quicklime laid.

THE GHOST OF ROGER CASEMENT

O WHAT has made that sudden noise?
What on the threshold stands?
It never crossed the sea because
John Bull and the sea are friends;
But this is not the old sea
Nor this the old seashore.
What gave that roar of mockery,
That roar in the sea's roar?
The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

John Bull has stood for Parliament,
A dog must have his day,
The country thinks no end of him,
For he knows how to say,
At a beanfeast or a banquet,
That all must hang their trust
Upon the British Empire,
Upon the Church of Christ.
The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

John Bull has gone to India
And all must pay him heed,
For histories are there to prove
That none of another breed
Has had a like inheritance,
Or sucked such milk as he,

And there’s no luck about a house
If it lack honesty.
The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

I poked about a village church
And found his family tomb
And copied out what I could read
In that religious gloom;
Found many a famous man there;
But fame and virtue rot.
Draw round, beloved and bitter men,
Draw round and raise a shout;
The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

THE O'RAHILLY

SING of the O'Rahilly,
Do not deny his right;
Sing a 'the' before his name;
Allow that he, despite
All those learned historians,
Established it for good;
He wrote out that word himself,
He christened himself with blood.
How goes the weather?

Sing of the O'Rahilly
That had such little sense
He told Pearse and Connolly
He'd gone to great expense
Keeping all the Kerry men
Out of that crazy fight;
That he might be there himself
Had travelled half the night.
How goes the weather?

'Am I such a craven that
I should not get the word
But for what some travelling man
Had heard I had not heard?'
Then on pearse and Connolly
He fixed a bitter look:
'Because I helped to wind the clock

I come to hear it strike.’
How goes the weather?

What remains to sing about
But of the death he met
Stretched under a doorway
Somewhere off Henry Street;
They that found him found upon
The door above his head
‘Here died the O’Rahilly.
R.I.P.’ writ in blood.
How goes the weather.?

COME GATHER ROUND ME, PARNELLITES

COME gather round me, Parnellites,
And praise our chosen man;
Stand upright on your legs awhile,
Stand upright while you can,
For soon we lie where he is laid,
And he is underground;
Come fill up all those glasses
And pass the bottle round.

And here's a cogent reason,
And I have many more,
He fought the might of England
And saved the Irish poor,
Whatever good a farmer's got
He brought it all to pass;
And here's another reason,
That parnell loved a lass.

And here's a final reason,
He was of such a kind
Every man that sings a song
Keeps Parnell in his mind.
For Parnell was a proud man,
No prouder trod the ground,
And a proud man's a lovely man,
So pass the bottle round.

The Bishops and the party
That tragic story made,
A husband that had sold hiS wife
And after that betrayed;
But stories that live longest
Are sung above the glass,
And Parnell loved his countrey
And parnell loved his lass.

THE WILD OLD WICKED MAN

BECAUSE I am mad about women
I am mad about the hills,'
Said that wild old wicked man
Who travels where God wills.
'Not to die on the straw at home.
Those hands to close these eyes,
That is all I ask, my dear,
From the old man in the skies.
Daybreak and a candle-end.

'Kind are all your words, my dear,
Do not the rest withhold.
Who can know the year, my dear,
when an old man's blood grows cold? '
I have what no young man can have
Because he loves too much.
Words I have that can pierce the heart,
But what can he do but touch?'
Daybreak and a candle-end.

Then Said she to that wild old man,
His stout stick under his hand,
'Love to give or to withhold
Is not at my command.
I gave it all to an older man:
That old man in the skies.
Hands that are busy with His beads

Can never close those eyes.’
Daybreak and a candle-end.

‘Go your ways, O go your ways,
I choose another mark,
Girls down on the seashore
Who understand the dark;
Bawdy talk for the fishermen;
A dance for the fisher-lads;
When dark hangs upon the water
They turn down their beds.
Daybreak and a candle-end.

‘A young man in the dark am I,
But a wild old man in the light,
That can make a cat laugh, or
Can touch by mother wit
Things hid in their marrow-bones
From time long passed away,
Hid from all those warty lads
That by their bodies lay.
Dayhreak and a candle-end.

‘All men live in suffering,
I know as few can know,
Whether they take the upper road
Or stay content on the low,
Rower bent in his row-boat
Or weaver bent at his loom,

Horseman erect upon horseback
Or child hid in the womb.
Daybreak and a candlc-cnd.

‘That some stream of lightning
From the old man in the skies
Can burn out that suffering
No right-taught man denies.
But a coarse old man am I,
I choose the second-best,
I forget it all awhile
Upon a woman’s breast.’
Daybreak and a candlc-end.

THE GREAT DAY

HURRAH for revolution and more cannon-shot!
A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.
Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again!
The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on.

PARNELL

Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man:
‘Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone.’

WHAT WAS LOST

I SING what was lost and dread what was won,
I walk in a battle fought over again,
My king a lost king, and lost soldiers my men;
Feet to the Rising and Setting may run,
They always beat on the same small stone.

THE SPUR

YOU think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attention upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song?

A DRUNKEN MAN'S PRAISE OF SOBRIETY

COME swish around, my pretty punk,
And keep me dancing still
That I may stay a sober man
Although I drink my fill.

Sobriety is a jewel
That I do much adore;
And therefore keep me dancing
Though drunkards lie and snore.
O mind your feet, O mind your feet,
Keep dancing like a wave,
And under every dancer
A dead man in his grave.
No ups and downs, my pretty,
A mermaid, not a punk;
A drunkard is a dead man,
And all dead men are drunk.

THE PILGRIM

I FASTED for some forty days on bread and buttermilk,
For passing round the bottle with girls in rags or silk,
In country shawl or Paris cloak, had put my wits astray,
And what's the good of women, for all that they can say
Is fol de rol de rolly O.

Round Lough Derg's holy island I went upon the stones,
I prayed at all the Stations upon my matrow-bones,
And there I found an old man, and though, I prayed all day
And that old man beside me, nothing would he say
But fol de rol de rolly O.

All know that all the dead in the world about that place are stuck,
And that should mother seek her son she'd have but little luck
Because the fires of purgatory have ate their shapes away;
I swear to God I questioned them, and all they had to say
Was fol de rol de rolly O.
A great black ragged bird appeared when I was in the boat;
Some twenty feet from tip to tip had it stretched rightly out,
With flopping and with flapping it made a great display,
But I never stopped to question, what could the boatman say
But fol de rol de rolly O.
Now I am in the public-house and lean upon the wall,
So come in rags or come in silk, in cloak or country shawl,
And come with learned lovers or with what men you may,
For I can put the whole lot down, and all I have to say
Is fol de rol de rolly O.

COLONEL MARTIN

THE Colonel went out sailing,
He spoke with Turk and Jew,
With Christian and with Infidel,
For all tongues he knew.
‘O what’s a wifeless man?’ said he,
And he came sailing home.
He rose the latch and went upstairS
And found an empty room.
The Colonel went out sailing.
‘I kept her much in the country
And she was much alone,
And though she may be there,’ he said,
‘She may be in the town.
She may be all alone there,
For who can say?’ he said.
‘I think that I shall find her
In a young man’s bed.’
The Colonel went out sailing.

III

The Colonel met a pedlar,
Agreed their clothes to swop,
And bought the grandest jewelry
In a Galway shop,
Instead of thread and needle
put jewelry in the pack,
Bound a thong about his hand,

Hitched it on his back.
The Colonel wcnt out sailing.
The Colonel knocked on the rich man's door,
'I am sorry,' said the maid,
'My mistress cannot see these things,
But she is still abed,
And never have I looked upon
Jewelry so grand.'
'Take all to your mistress,'
And he laid them on her hand.
The Colonel went out sailing.
And he went in and she went on
And both climbed up the stair,
And O he was a clever man,
For he his slippers wore.
And when they came to the top stair
He ran on ahead,
His wife he found and the rich man
In the comfort of a bed.
The Colonel went out sailing.
The Judge at the Assize Court,
When he heard that story told,
Awarded him for damages
Three kegs of gold.
The Colonel said to Tom his man,
'Harness an ass and cart,
Carry the gold about the town,

Throw it in every patt.’
The Colonel went out sailing.

VII
And there at all street-corners
A man with a pistol stood,
And the rich man had paid them well
To shoot the Colonel dead;
But they threw down their pistols
And all men heard them swear
That they could never shoot a man
Did all that for the poor.
The Colonel went out sailing.

VIII
‘And did you keep no gold, Tom?
You had three kegs,’ said he.
‘I never thought of that, Sir.’
‘Then want before you die.’
And want he did; for my own grand-dad
Saw the story’s end,
And Tom make out a living
From the seaweed on the strand.
The Colonel went out sailing.

A MODEL FOR THE LAUREATE

ON thrones from China to Peru
All sorts of kings have sat
That men and women of all sorts
proclaimed both good and great;
And what's the odds if such as these
For reason of the State
Should keep their lovers waiting,
Keep their lovers waiting?
Some boast of beggar-kings and kings
Of rascals black and white
That rule because a strong right arm
Puts all men in a fright,
And drunk or sober live at ease
Where none gainsay their right,
And keep their lovers waiting,
Keep their lovers waiting.
The Muse is mute when public men
Applaud a modern throne:
Those cheers that can be bought or sold,
That office fools have run,
That waxen seal, that signature.
For things like these what decent man
Would keep his lover waiting,
Keep his lover waiting?

THE OLD STONE CROSS

A STATESMAN is an easy man,
He tells his lies by rote;
A journalist makes up his lies
And takes you by the throat;
So stay at home' and drink your beer
And let the neighbours' vote,

Said the man in the golden breastplate
Under the old stone Cross.

Because this age and the next age
Engender in the ditch,
No man can know a happy man
From any passing wretch;
If Folly link with Elegance
No man knows which is which,

Said the man in the golden breastplate
Under the old stone Cross.

But actors lacking music
Do most excite my spleen,
They say it is more human
To shuffle, grunt and groan,
Not knowing what unearthly stuff
Rounds a mighty scene,

Said the man in the golden breastplate
Under the old stone Cross.

THE SPIRIT MEDIUM

POETRY, music, I have loved, and yet
Because of those new dead
That come into my soul and escape
Confusion of the bed,
Or those begotten or unbegotten
Perning in a band,

I bend my body to the spade
Or grope with a dirty hand.

Or those begotten or unbegotten,
For I would not recall
Some that being unbegotten
Are not individual,
But copy some one action,
Moulding it of dust or sand,

I bend my body to the spade
Or grope with a dirty hand.

An old ghost's thoughts are lightning,
To follow is to die;
Poetry and music I have banished,
But the stupidity
Of root, shoot, blossom or clay
Makes no demand.

I bend my body to the spade
Or grope with a dirty hand.

THOSE IMAGES

WHAT if I bade you leave
The cavern of the mind?
There's better exercise
In the sunlight and wind.
I never bade you go
To Moscow or to Rome.
Renounce that drudgery,
Call the Muses home.
Seek those images
That constitute the wild,
The lion and the virgin,
The harlot and the child
Find in middle air
An eagle on the wing,
Recognise the five
That make the Muses sing.

THE MUNICIPAL GALLERY REVISITED

AROUND me the images of thirty years:
An ambush; pilgrims at the water-side;
Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,
Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical pride;
Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
A gentle questioning look that cannot hide
A soul incapable of remorse or rest;
A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed;
An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand
Blessing the Tricolour. 'This is not,' I say,
'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland
The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'
Before a woman's portrait suddenly I stand,
Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way.
I met her all but fifty years ago
For twenty minutes in some studio.

III
Heart-smitten with emotion I Sink down,
My heart recovering with covered eyes;
Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
My permanent or impermanent images:
Augusta Gregory's son; her sister's son,
Hugh Lane, 'onlie begetter' of all these;
Hazel Lavery living and dying, that tale
As though some ballad-singer had sung it all;
Mancini's portrait of Augusta Gregory,

‘Greatest since Rembrandt,’ according to John Synge;
A great ebullient portrait certainly;
But where is the brush that could show anything
Of all that pride and that humility?
And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again.
My mediaeval knees lack health until they bend,
But in that woman, in that household where
Honour had lived so long, all lacking found.
Childless I thought, ‘My children may find here
Deep-rooted things,’ but never foresaw its end,
And now that end has come I have not wept;
No fox can foul the lair the badger swept —

VI

(An image out of Spenser and the common tongue).
John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
All that we did, all that we said or sang
Must come from contact with the soil, from that
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Everything down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.

VII

And here’s John Synge himself, that rooted man,
‘Forgetting human words,’ a grave deep face.
You that would judge me, do not judge alone

This book or that, come to this hallowed place
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends.

ARE YOU CONTENT?

I CALL on those that call me son,
Grandson, or great-grandson,
On uncles, aunts, great-uncles or great-aunts,
To judge what I have done.
Have I, that put it into words,
Spoilt what old loins have sent?
Eyes spiritualised by death can judge,
I cannot, but I am not content.
He that in Sligo at Drumcliff
Set up the old stone Cross,
That red-headed rector in County Down,
A good man on a horse,
Sandymount Corbets, that notable man
Old William pollexfen,
The smuggler Middleton, Butlers far back,
Half legendary men.
Infirm and aged I might stay
In some good company,
I who have always hated work,
Smiling at the sea,
Or demonstrate in my own life
What Robert Browning meant
By an old hunter talking with Gods;
But I am not content.

Poems from ‘On the Boiler’

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WHY SHOULD NOT OLD MEN BE MAD?
CRAZY JANE ON THE MOUNTAIN
A STATESMAN'S HOLIDAY

WHY SHOULD NOT OLD MEN BE MAD?

WHY should not old men be mad?
Some have known a likely lad
That had a sound fly-fisher's wrist
Turn to a drunken journalist;
A girl that knew all Dante once
Live to bear children to a dunce;
A Helen of social welfare dream,
Climb on a wagonette to scream.
Some think it a matter of course that chance
Should starve good men and bad advance,
That if their neighbours figured plain,
As though upon a lighted screen,
No single story would they find
Of an unbroken happy mind,
A finish worthy of the start.
Young men know nothing of this sort,
Observant old men know it well;
And when they know what old books tell
And that no better can be had,
Know why an old man should be mad.

CRAZY JANE ON THE MOUNTAIN

I AM tired of cursing the Bishop,
(Said Crazy Jane)
Nine books or nine hats
Would not make him a man.
I have found something worse
To meditate on.
A King had some beautiful cousins.
But where are they gone?
Battered to death in a cellar,
And he stuck to his throne.
Last night I lay on the mountain.
(Said Crazy Jane)
There in a two-horsed carriage
That on two wheels ran
Great-bladdered Emer sat.
Her violent man
Cuchulain sat at her side;
Thereupon’
Propped upon my two knees,
I kissed a stone
I lay stretched out in the dirt
And I cried tears down.

A STATESMAN'S HOLIDAY

I lived among great houses,
Riches drove out rank,
Base drove out the better blood,
And mind and body shrank.
No Oscar ruled the table,
But I'd a troop of friends
That knowing better talk had gone
Talked of odds and ends.
Some knew what ailed the world
But never said a thing,
So I have picked a better trade
And night and morning sing:
Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.

Am I a great Lord Chancellor
That slept upon the Sack?
Commanding officer that tore
The khaki from his back?
Or am I de Valera,
Or the King of Greece,
Or the man that made the motors?
Ach, call me what you please!
Here's a Montenegrin lute,
And its old sole string
Makes me sweet music
And I delight to sing:
Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.

With boys and girls about him.
With any sort of clothes,
With a hat out of fashion,
With Old patched shoes,
With a ragged bandit cloak,
With an eye like a hawk,
With a stiff straight back,
With a strutting turkey walk.
With a bag full of pennies,
With a monkey on a chain,
With a great cock’s feather,
With an old foul tune.
Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.

Last Poems

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UNDER BEN BULBEN

I

SWEAR by what the sages spoke
Round the Mareotic Lake
That the Witch of Atlas knew,
Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.

Swear by those horsemen, by those women
Complexion and form prove superhuman,
That pale, long-visaged company
That air in immortality
Completeness of their passions won;
Now they ride the wintry dawn
Where Ben Bulben sets the scene.

Here s the gist of what they mean.

II

Many times man lives and dies
Between his two eternities,
That of race and that of soul,
And ancient Ireland knew it all.
Whether man die in his bed
Or the rifle knocks him dead,
A brief parting from those dear
Is the worst man has to fear.
Though grave-diggers' toil is long,

Sharp their spades, their muscles strong.
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again.

III

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard,
'Send war in our time, O Lord!'
Know that when all words are said
And a man is fighting mad,
Something drops from eyes long blind,
He completes his partial mind,
For an instant stands at ease,
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace.
Even the wisest man grows tense
With some sort of violence
Before he can accomplish fate,
Know his work or choose his mate.

IV

Poet and sculptor, do the work,
Nor let the modish painter shirk
What his great forefathers did.
Bring the soul of man to God,
Make him fill the cradles right.

Measurement began our might:
Forms a stark Egyptian thought,
Forms that gentler phidias wrought.

Michael Angelo left a proof
On the Sistine Chapel roof,
Where but half-awakened Adam
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
Till her bowels are in heat,
proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind:
Profane perfection of mankind.

Quattrocento put in paint
On backgrounds for a God or Saint
Gardens where a soul's at ease;
Where everything that meets the eye,
Flowers and grass and cloudless sky,
Resemble forms that are or seem
When sleepers wake and yet still dream.
And when it's vanished still declare,
With only bed and bedstead there,
That heavens had opened.
Gyres run on;
When that greater dream had gone
Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude,
Prepared a rest for the people of God,
Palmer's phrase, but after that
Confusion fell upon our thought.

Irish poets, earn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.
Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen,
The holiness of monks, and after
Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;
Sing the lords and ladies gay
That were beaten into the clay
Through seven heroic centuries;
Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry.

VI

Under bare Ben Bulben's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
An ancestor was rector there
Long years ago, a church stands near,
By the road an ancient cross.

No marble, no conventional phrase;
On limestone quarried near the spot
By his command these words are cut:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!

THREE SONGS TO THE ONE BURDEN

THE Roaring Tinker if you like,
But Mannion is my name,
And I beat up the common sort
And think it is no shame.
The common breeds the common,
A lout begets a lout,
So when I take on half a score
I knock their heads about.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

All Mannions come from Manannan,
Though rich on every shore
He never lay behind four walls
He had such character,
Nor ever made an iron red
Nor soldered pot or pan;
His roaring and his ranting
Best please a wandering man.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

Could Crazy Jane put off old age
And ranting time renew,
Could that old god rise up again
We'd drink a can or two,
And out and lay our leadership
On country and on town,
Throw likely couples into bed

And knock the others down.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

II
My name is Henry Middleton,
I have a small demesne,
A small forgotten house that's set
On a storm-bitten green.
I scrub its floors and make my bed,
I cook and change my plate,
The post and garden-boy alone
Have keys to my old gate.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

Though I have locked my gate on them,
I pity all the young,
I know what devil's trade they learn
From those they live among,
Their drink, their pitch-and-toss by day,
Their robbery by night;
The wisdom of the people's gone,
How can the young go straight?
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

When every Sunday afternoon
On the Green Lands I walk
And wear a coat in fashion.
Memories of the talk
Of henwives and of queer old men

Brace me and make me strong;
There's not a pilot on the perch
Knows I have lived so long.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

III
Come gather round me, players all:
Come praise Nineteen-Sixteen,
Those from the pit and gallery
Or from the painted scene
That fought in the Post Office
Or round the City Hall,
praise every man that came again,
Praise every man that fell.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

Who was the first man shot that day?
The player Connolly,
Close to the City Hall he died;
Catriage and voice had he;
He lacked those years that go with skill,
But later might have been
A famous, a brilliant figure
Before the painted scene.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

Some had no thought of victory
But had gone out to die
That Ireland's mind be greater,

Her heart mount up on high;
And yet who knows what's yet to come?
For patrick pearse had said
That in every generation
Must Ireland's blood be shed.
From mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen.

THE BLACK TOWER

SAY that the men of the old black tower,
Though they but feed as the goatherd feeds,
Their money spent, their wine gone sour,
Lack nothing that a soldier needs,
That all are oath-bound men:
Those banners come not in.

There in the tomb stand the dead upright,
But winds come up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

Those banners come to bribe or threaten,
Or whisper that a man's a fool
Who, when his own right king's forgotten,
Cares what king sets up his rule.
If he died long ago
Why do yopu dread us so?

There in the tomb drops the faint moonlight,
But wind comes up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber
Catching small birds in the dew of the morn
When we hale men lie stretched in slumber
Swears that he hears the king's great horn.

But he’s a lying hound:
Stand we on guard oath-bound!

There in the tomb the dark grows blacker,
But wind comes up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

CUCHULAIN COMFORTED

A MAN that had six mortal wounds, a man
Violent and famous, strode among the dead;
Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone.

Then certain Shrouds that muttered head to head
Came and were gone. He leant upon a tree
As though to meditate on wounds and blood.

A Shroud that seemed to have authority
Among those bird-like things came, and let fall
A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and thrce

Came creeping up because the man was still.
And thereupon that linen-carrier said:
‘Your life can grow much sweeter if you will

‘Obey our ancient rule and make a shroud;
Mainly because of what we only know
The rattle of those arms makes us afraid.

‘We thread the needles’ eyes, and all we do
All must together do.’ That done, the man
Took up the nearest and began to sew.

‘Now must we sing and sing the best we can,
But first you must be told our character:
Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain

‘Or driven from home and left to dic in fear.’
They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,
Though all was done in common as before;

They had changed their thtoats and had the throats of birds.

THREE MARCHING SONGS

REMEMBER all those renowned generations,
They left their bodies to fatten the wolves,
They left their homesteads to fatten the foxes,
Fled to far countries, or sheltered themselves
In cavern, crevice, or hole,
Defending Ireland's soul.
Be still, be still, what can be said?
My father sang that song,
But time amends old wrong,
All that is finished, let it fade.
Remember all those renowned generations,
Remember all that have sunk in their blood,
Remember all that have died on the scaffold,
Remember all that have fled, that have stood,
Stood, took death like a tune
On an old,tambourine.
Be still, be still, what can be said?
My father sang that song,
But time amends old wrong,
And all that's finished, let it fade.
Fail, and that history turns into rubbish,
All that great past to a trouble of fools;
Those that come after shall mock at O'Donnell,
Mock at the memory of both O'Neills,
Mock Emmet, mock Parnell,
All the renown that fell.
Be still, be still, what can be said?

My father sang that song,
but time amends old wrong,
And all that's finished, let it fade.
The soldier takes pride in saluting his Captain,
The devotee proffers a knee to his Lord,
Some back a mare thrown from a thoroughbred,,
Troy backed its Helen; Troy died and adored;
Great nations blossom above;
A slave bows down to a slave.
What marches through the mountain pass?
No, no, my son, not yet;
That is an airy spot,
And no man knows what treads the grass.
We know what rascal might has defiled,
The lofty innocence that it has slain,
Were we not born in the peasant's cot
Where men forgive if the belly gain?
More dread the life that we live,
How can the mind forgive?
What marches down the mountain pass?
No, no, my son, not yet;
That is an airy spot,
And no man knows what treads the grass.
What if there's nothing up there at the top?
Where are the captains that govern mankind?
What tears down a tree that has nothing within it?
A blast of the wind, O a marching wind,
March wind, and any old tune.

March, march, and how does it run?
What marches down the mountain pass?
No, no, my son, not yet;
That is an airy spot,
And no man knows what treads the grass.

III
Grandfather sang it under the gallows:
‘Hear, gentlemen, ladies, and all mankind:
Money is good and a girl might be better,
But good strong blows are delights to the mind.’
There, standing on the cart,
He sang it from his heart.
<1Robbers had taken his old tambourine,
But he took down the moon
And rattled out a tunc;
Robbers had taken his old tambourinc.>1
‘A girl I had, but she followed another,
Money I had, and it went in the night,
Strong drink I had, and it brought me to sorrow,
But a good strong cause and blows are delight.’
All there caught up the tune:
‘Oh, on, my darling man.’

Robbers had taken his old tambourine,
But he took down the moon
And rattled out a tune;>1
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.
‘Money is good and a girl might be better,

No matter what happens and who takes the fall,
But a good strong cause’ — the rope gave a jerk there,
No more sang he, for his throat was too small;
But he kicked before he died,
He did it out of pride.
<1Robbers had taken his old tambourine,
But he took down the moon
And rattled out a tune;
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.

IN TARA'S HALLS

A MAN I praise that once in Tara's Hals
Said to the woman on his knees, 'Lie still.
My hundredth year is at an end. I think
That something is about to happen, I think
That the adventure of old age begins.
To many women I have said, ''Lie still,''
And given everything a woman needs,
A roof, good clothes, passion, love perhaps,
But never asked for love; should I ask that,
I shall be old indeed.'
Thereon the man
Went to the Sacred House and stood between
The golden plough and harrow and spoke aloud
That all attendants and the casual crowd might hear.
'God I have loved, but should I ask return
Of God or woman, the time were come to die.'
He bade, his hundred and first year at end,
Diggers and carpenters make grave and coffin;
Saw that the grave was deep, the coffin sound,
Summoned the generations of his house,
Lay in the coffin, stopped his breath and died.

THE STATUES

PYTHAGORAS planned it. Why did the people stare?
His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
That passion could bring character enough,
And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.
No! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men
That with a mallet or a chisel' modelled these
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
All Asiatic vague immensities,
And not the banks of oars that swam upon
The many-headed foam at Salamis.
Europe put off that foam when Phidias
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.
One image crossed the many-headed, sat
Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,
No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eyeballs knew
That knowledge increases unreality, that
Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.
When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.
When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side.
What stalked through the post Office? What intellect,
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?

We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.
April 9,

NEWS FOR THE DELPHIC ORACLE

THERE all the golden codgers lay,
There the silver dew,
And the great water sighed for love,
And the wind sighed too.
Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed
By Oisin on the grass;
There sighed amid his choir of love
Tall pythagoras.
plotinus came and looked about,
The salt-flakes on his breast,
And having stretched and yawned awhile
Lay sighing like the rest.
Straddling each a dolphin's back
And steadied by a fin,
Those Innocents re-live their death,
Their wounds open again.
The ecstatic waters laugh because
Their cries are sweet and strange,
Through their ancestral patterns dance,
And the brute dolphins plunge
Until, in some cliff-sheltered bay
Where wades the choir of love
Proffering its sacred laurel crowns,
They pitch their burdens off.

LONG-LEGGED FLY

THAT civilisation may not sink,
Its great battle lost,
Quiet the dog, tether the pony
To a distant post;
Our master Caesar is in the tent
Where the maps ate spread,
His eyes fixed upon nothing,
A hand under his head.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.

That the topless towers be burnt
And men recall that face,
Move most gently if move you must
In this lonely place.
She thinks, part woman, three parts a child,
That nobody looks; her feet
Practise a tinker shuffle
Picked up on a street.

Like a long-legged fly upon the stream
Her mind moves upon silence.

That girls at puberty may find
The first Adam in their thought,
Shut the door of the Pope's chapel,
Keep those children out.

There on that scaffolding reclines
Michael Angelo.
With no more sound than the mice make
His hand moves to and fro.
Like a long-leggedfly upon the stream
His mind moves upon silence.

A BRONZE HEAD

HERE at right of the entrance this bronze head,
Human, superhuman, a bird's round eye,
Everything else withered and mummy-dead.
What great tomb-haunter sweeps the distant sky
(Something may linger there though all else die;)
And finds there nothing to make its tetror less
Hysterica passio of its own emptiness?

No dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full
As though with magnanimity of light,
Yet a most gentle woman; who can tell
Which of her forms has shown her substance right?
Or maybe substance can be composite,
profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath
A mouthful held the extreme of life and death.

But even at the starting-post, all sleek and new,
I saw the wildness in her and I thought
A vision of terror that it must live through
Had shattered her soul. Propinquity had brought
Imagiation to that pitch where it casts out
All that is not itself: I had grown wild
And wandered murmuring everywhere, 'My child, my
child! '

Or else I thought her supernatural;
As though a sterner eye looked through her eye
On this foul world in its decline and fall;

On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,
Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,
Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave,
And wondered what was left for massacre to save.

A STICK OF INCENSE

Whence did all that fury come?
From empty tomb or Virgin womb?
Saint Joseph thought the world would melt
But liked the way his finger smelt.

HOUND VOICE

BECAUSE we love bare hills and stunted trees
And were the last to choose the settled ground,
Its boredom of the desk or of the spade, because
So many years companioned by a hound,
Our voices carry; and though slumber-bound,
Some few half wake and half renew their choice,
Give tongue, proclaim their hidden name — ‘Hound Voice.’

The women that I picked spoke sweet and low
And yet gave tongue. ‘Hound Voices’ were they all.
We picked each other from afar and knew
What hour of terror comes to test the soul,
And in that terror’s name obeyed the call,
And understood, what none have understood,
Those images that waken in the blood.
Some day we shall get up before the dawn
And find our ancient hounds before the door,
And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore;
Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
And chantS of victory amid the encircling hounds.

JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENT FOR MR. MARY MOORE

A BLOODY and a sudden end,
Gunshot or a noose,
For Death who takes what man would keep,
Leaves what man would lose.
He might have had my sister,
My cousins by the score,
But nothing satisfied the fool
But my dear Mary Moore,
None other knows what pleasures man
At table or in bed.
What shall I do for pretty girls
Now my old bawd is dead?
Though stiff to strike a bargain,
Like an old Jew man,
Her bargain struck we laughed and talked
And emptied many a can;
And O! but she had stories,
Though not for the priest's ear,
To keep the soul of man alive,
Banish age and care,
And being old she put a skin
On everything she said.
What shall I do for pretty girls
Now my old bawd is dead?

The priests have got a book that says
But for Adam's sin

Eden’s Garden would be there
And I there within.
No expectation fails there,
No pleasing habit ends,
No man grows old, no girl grows cold
But friends walk by friends.
Who quarrels over halfpennies
That plucks the trees for bread?
What shall I do for pretty girls
Now my old bawd is dead?

HIGH TALK

PROCESSIONS that lack high stilts have nothing that catches the eye.
What if my great-granddad had a pair that were twenty foot high,
And mine were but fifteen foot, no modern Stalks upon higher,
Some rogue of the world stole them to patch up a fence or a fire.
Because piebald ponies, led bears, caged lions, ake but poor shows,
Because children demand Daddy-long-legs upon This timber toes,
Because women in the upper storeys demand a face at the pane,
That patching old heels they may shriek, I take to chisel and plane.

Malachi Stilt-Jack am I, whatever I learned has run wild, From collar to collar, from stilt to stilt, from father to child.
All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all. A barnacle goose
Far up in the stretches of night; night splits and the dawn breaks loose;
I, through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk on;
Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn.

THE APPARITIONS

BECAUSE there is safety in derision
I talked about an apparition,
I took no trouble to convince,
Or seem plausible to a man of sense.
Distrustful of thar popular eye
Whether it be bold or sly.
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.

I have found nothing half so good
As my long-planned half solitude,
Where I can sit up half the night
With some friend that has the wit
Not to allow his looks to tell
When I am unintelligible.
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.

When a man grows old his joy
Grows more deep day after day,
His empty heart is full at length,
But he has need of all that strength
Because of the increasing Night
That opens her mystery and fright.
Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.

A NATIVITY

WHAT woman hugs her infant there?
Another star has shot an ear.

What made the drapery glisten so?
Not a man but Delacroix.

What made the ceiling waterproof?
Landor’s tarpaulin on the roof

What brushes fly and moth aside?
Irving and his plume of pride.

What hurries out the knaye and dolt?
Talma and his thunderbolt.

Why is the woman terror-struck?
Can there be mercy in that look?

MAN AND THE ECHO

Man. In a cleft that's christened Alt
Under broken stone I halt
At the bottom of a pit
That broad noon has never lit,
And shout a secret to the stone.
All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.
Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?
Did words of mine put too great strain
On that woman's reeling brain?
Could my spoken words have checked
That whereby a house lay wrecked?
And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die.

Echo. Lie down and die.

Man. That were to shirk
The spiritual intellect's great work,
And shirk it in vain. There is no release
In a bodkin or disease,
Nor can there be work so great
As that which cleans man's dirty slate.
While man can still his body keep

Wine or love drug him to sleep,
Waking he thanks the Lord that he
Has body and its stupidity,
But body gone he sleeps no more,
And till his intellect grows sure
That all's arranged in one clear view,
pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
Then stands in judgment on his soul,
And, all work done, dismisses all
Out of intellect and sight
And sinks at last into the night.

Echo. Into the night.

Man. O Rocky Voice,
Shall we in that great night rejoice?
What do we know but that we face
One another in this place?
But hush, for I have lost the theme,
Its joy or night-seem but a dream;
Up there some hawk or owl has struck,
Dropping out of sky or rock,
A stricken rabbit is crying out,
And its cry distracts my thought.

THE CIRCUS ANIMALS' DESERTION

I

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
Maybe at last, being but a broken man,
I must be satisfied with my heart, although
Winter and summer till old age began
My circus animals were all on show,
Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,
Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

II

What can I but enumerate old themes?
First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;
But what cared I that set him on to ride,
I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride?

And then a counter-truth filled out its play,
'The Countess Cathleen' was the name I gave it;
She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away,
But masterful Heaven had intetvened to save it.
I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,

And this brought forth a dream and soon enough
This dream itself had all my thought and love.

And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;
Heart-mysteries there, and yet when all is said
It was the dream itself enchanted me:
Character isolated by a deed
To engross the present and dominate memory.
players and painted stage took all my love,
And not those things that they were emblems of.

III

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

POLITICS

HOW can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms!

The Poems

23 Fitzroy Road, North London, where Yeats stayed with his family between 1867 and 1873

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The Plays

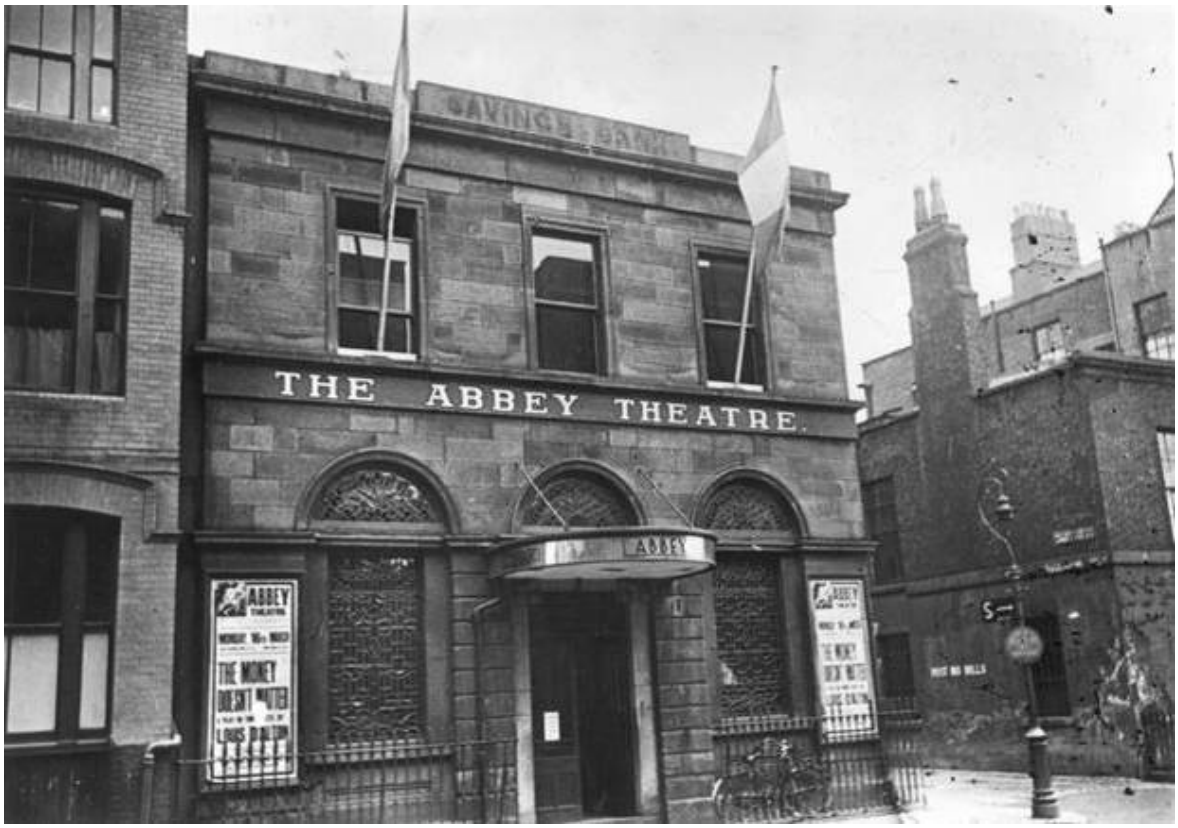
Godolphin School, Hammersmith, London, where Yeats was an art student

The Countess Cathleen

Written in blank verse, Yeats' first play was published in 1892 in the anthology *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*. The play underwent several changes until the final version was performed in 1911 and published the following year. *The Countess Kathleen* is set in Ireland during a famine and portrays the idealistic Countess as selling her soul to the devil to save her tenants from starvation. After her death, she is redeemed as her motives were altruistic and ascends to Heaven.

Yeats based the play on the Irish legend of Cathleen O'Shea, which had been printed in an Anglo-Irish newspaper in 1867. When he later attempted to trace its origins, the story appeared to have been adapted into English from a French story, *Les marchands d'âmes*, whose protagonist was named "comtesse Ketty O'Connor".

The play was first performed on May 8, 1899, as the Irish Literary Theatre's inaugural production, in the Antient Concert Rooms, Dublin, while the final version was performed at the Abbey Theatre on December 14, 1911. It provoked controversy from several critics over the blasphemous attitudes it apparently supported and it has also been accused of having an anti-English theme.



The Abbey Theatre, Dublin, which Yeats co-founded in 1904 and where many of his plays were first performed

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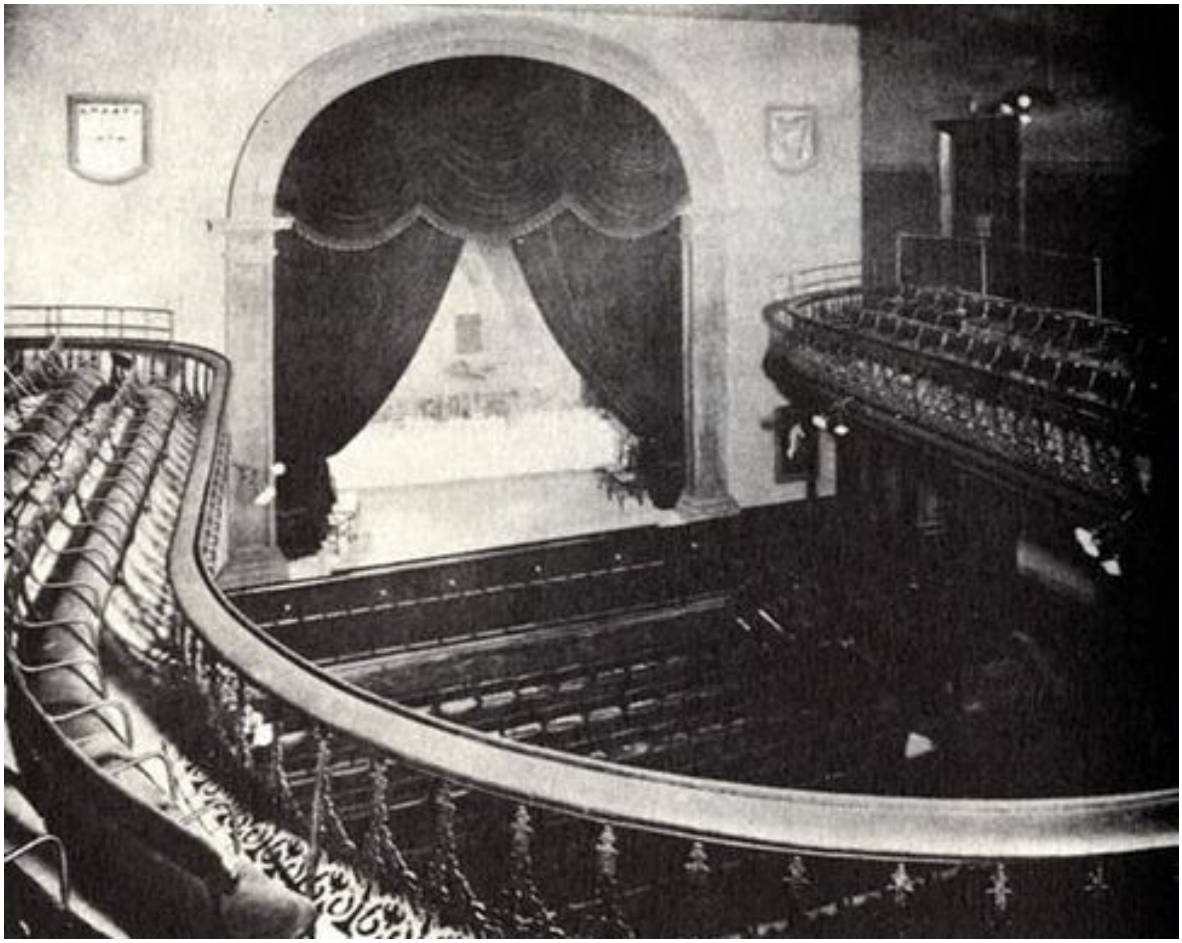

Inside the theatre

To MAUD GONNE

"The sorrowful are dumb for thee"

Lament of Morion Shehone for Miss Mary Bourke

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

SHEMUS RUA, A Peasant

MARY, His Wife

TEIG, His Son

ALEEL, A Poet

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

OONA, Her Foster Mother

Two Demons disguised as Merchants

Peasants, Servants, Angelical Beings, Spirits

The Scene is laid in Ireland and in old times.

SCENE 1

SCENE — A room with lighted fire, and a door into the open air, through which one sees, perhaps, the trees of a wood, and these trees should be painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky. The walls are of one colour. The scene should have the effect of missal Painting. MARY, a woman of forty years or so, is grinding a quern.

MARY. What can have made the grey hen flutter so?

(TEIG, a boy of fourteen, is coming in with turf, which he lays beside the hearth.)

TEIG. They say that now the land is famine struck The graves are walking.

MARY. There is something that the hen hears.

TEIG. And that is not the worst; at Tubber-vanach A woman met a man with ears spread out, And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

MARY. What can have kept your father all this while?

TEIG. Two nights ago, at Carrick-orus churchyard, A herdsman met a man who had no mouth, Nor eyes, nor ears; his face a wall of flesh; He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

MARY. Look out, and tell me if your father's coming.

(TEIG goes to door.)

TEIG. Mother!

MARY. What is it?

TEIG. In the bush beyond, There are two birds — if you can call them birds — I could not see them rightly for the leaves. But they've the shape and colour of horned owls And I'm half certain they've a human face.

MARY. Mother of God, defend us!

TEIG. They're looking at me. What is the good of praying? father says. God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep. What do they care, he says, though the whole land Squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth?

MARY. You'll bring misfortune with your blasphemies Upon your father, or yourself, or me. I would to God he were home — ah, there he is.

(SHEMUS comes in.)

What was it kept you in the wood? You know I cannot get all sorts of accidents Out of my mind till you are home again.

SHEMUS. I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter. Although I tramped the woods for half a day, I've taken nothing, for the very rats, Badgers, and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought, And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.

TEIG. Then you have brought no dinner.

SHEMUS. After that I sat among the beggars at the cross-roads, And held a hollow hand among the others.

MARY. What, did you beg?

SHEMUS. I had no chance to beg, For when the beggars saw me they cried out They would not have another share their alms, And hunted me away

with sticks and stones.

TEIG. You said that you would bring us food or money.

SHEMUS. What's in the house?

TEIG. A bit of mouldy bread.

MARY. There's flour enough to make another loaf.

TEIG. And when that's gone?

MARY. There is the hen in the coop.

SHEMUS. My curse upon the beggars, my Curse upon them!

TEIG. And the last penny gone.

SHEMUS. When the hen's gone, What can we do but live on sorrel and dock) And dandelion, till our mouths are green?

MARY. God, that to this hour's found bit and sup, Will cater for us still.

SHEMUS. His kitchen's bare. There were five doors that I looked through this day And saw the dead and not a soul to wake them.

MARY. Maybe He'd have us die because He knows, When the ear is stopped and when the eye is stopped, That every wicked sight is hid from the eye, And all fool talk from the ear.

SHEMUS. Who's passing there? And mocking us with music?

(A stringed instrument without.)

TEIG. A young man plays it, There's an old woman and a lady with him.

SHEMUS. What is the trouble of the poor to her? Nothing at all or a harsh radishy sauce For the day's meat.

MARY. God's pity on the rich, Had we been through as many doors, and seen The dishes standing on the polished wood In the wax candle light, we'd be as hard, And there's the needle's eye at the end of all.

SHEMUS. My curse upon the rich.

TEIG. They're coming here.

SHEMUS. Then down upon that stool, down quick, I say, And call up a whey face and a whining voice, And let your head be bowed upon your knees.

MARY. Had I but time to put the place to rights.

(CATHLEEN, OONA, and ALEEL enter.)

CATHLEEN. God save all here. There is a certain house, An old grey castle with a kitchen garden, A cider orchard and a plot for flowers, Somewhere among these woods.

MARY. We know it, lady. A place that's set among impassable walls As though world's trouble could not find it out.

CATHLEEN. It may be that we are that trouble, for we — Although we've wandered in the wood this hour — Have lost it too, yet I should know my way, For I lived all my childhood in that house.

MARY. Then you are Countess Cathleen?

CATHLEEN. And this woman, Oona, my nurse, should have remembered it, For we were happy for a long time there.

OONA. The paths are overgrown with thickets now, Or else some change has come upon my sight.

CATHLEEN. And this young man, that should have known the woods — Because we met him on their border but now, Wandering and singing like a wave of the sea — Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come That he can give no help.

MARY. You have still some way, But I can put you on the trodden path Your servants take when they are marketing. But first sit down and rest yourself awhile, For my old fathers served your fathers, lady, Longer than books can tell — and it were strange If you and yours should not be welcome here.

CATHLEEN. And it were stranger still were I ungrateful For such kind welcome but I must be gone, For the night's gathering in.

SHEMUS. It is a long while Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it.

CATHLEEN. So you are starving even in this wood, Where I had thought I would find nothing changed. But that's a dream, for the old worm o' the world Can eat its way into what place it pleases.

(She gives money.)

TEIG. Beautiful lady, give me something too; I fell but now, being weak with hunger and thirst, And lay upon the threshold like a log.

CATHLEEN. I gave for all and that was all I had. Look, my purse is empty. I have passed By starving men and women all this day, And they have had the rest; but take the purse, The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle. But if you'll come to-morrow to my house You shall have twice the sum.

(ALEEL begins to play.)

SHEMUS (muttering). What, music, music!

CATHLEEN. Ah, do not blame the finger on the string; The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times And find distraction for my thoughts, or else Pine to my grave.

SHEMUS. I have said nothing, lady. Why should the like of us complain?

OONA. Have done. Sorrows that she's but read of in a book Weigh on her mind as if they had been her own.

(OONA, MARY, and CATHLEEN go Out. ALEEL looks defiantly at SHEMUS.)

ALEEL. (Singing) Impetuous heart, be still, be still, Your sorrowful love can never be told, Cover it up with a lonely tune, He that could bend all things to His will Has covered the door of the infinite fold With the pale stars and the wandering moon.

(He takes a step towards the door and then turns again.)

Shut to the door before the night has fallen, For who can say what walks, or in what shape Some devilish creature flies in the air, but now Two grey-horned owls hooted above our heads.

(He goes out, his singing dies away. MARY comes in. SHEmus has been counting the money.)

TEIG. There's no good luck in owls, but it may be That the ill luck's to fall upon their heads.

MARY. You never thanked her ladyship.

SHEMUS. Thank her, For seven halfpence and a silver bit?

TEIG. But for this empty purse?

SHEMUS. What's that for thanks, Or what's the double of it that she promised? With bread and flesh and every sort of food Up to a price no man has heard the like of And rising every day.

MARY. We have all she had; She emptied out the purse before our eyes.

SHEMUS (to MARY, who has gone to close the door) Leave that door open.

MARY. When those that have read books, And seen the seven wonders of the world, Fear what's above or what's below the ground, It's time that poverty should bolt the door.

SHEMUS. I'll have no bolts, for there is not a thing That walks above the ground or under it I had not rather welcome to this house Than any more of mankind, rich or poor.

TEIG. So that they brought us money.

SHEMUS. I heard say There's something that appears like a white bird, A pigeon or a seagull or the like, But if you hit it with a stone or a stick It clangs as though it had been made of brass; And that if you dig down where it was scratching You'll find a crock of gold.

TEIG. But dream of gold For three nights running, and there's always gold.

SHEMUS. You might be starved before you've dug it out.

TEIG. But maybe if you called, something would come, They have been seen of late.

MARY. Is it call devils? Call devils from the wood, call them in here?

SHEMUS. So you'd stand up against me, and you'd say Who or what I am to welcome here.

(He hits her.)

That is to show who's master.

TEIG. Call them in.

MARY. God help us all!

SHEMUS. Pray, if you have a mind to. it's little that the sleepy ears above Care for your words; but I'll call what I please.

TEIG. There is many a one, they say, had money from them.

SHEMUS. (at door) Whatever you are that walk the woods at night, So be it that you have not shouldered up Out of a grave — for I'll have nothing human — And have free hands, a friendly trick of speech, I welcome you. Come, sit beside the fire. What matter if your head's below your arms Or you've a horse's tail to whip your flank, Feathers instead of hair, that's but a straw, Come, share what bread and meat is in the house, And stretch your heels and warm them in the ashes. And after that, let's share and share alike And curse all men and women. Come in, come in. What, is there no one there?

(Turning from door)

And yet they say They are as common as the grass, and ride Even upon the book in the priest's hand.

(TEIG lifts one arm slowly and points toward the door and begins moving backwards. SHEMUS turns, he also sees something and begins moving backward. MARY does the same. A man dressed as an Eastern merchant comes in carrying a small carpet. He unrolls it and sits cross-legged at one end of it. Another man dressed in the same way follows, and sits at the other end. This is done slowly and deliberately. When they are seated they take money out of embroidered purses at their girdles and begin arranging it on the carpet.

TEIG. You speak to them.

SHEMUS. No, you.

TEIG. 'Twas you that called them.

SHEMUS. (coming nearer) I'd make so bold, if you would pardon it, To ask if there's a thing you'd have of us. Although we are but poor people, if there is, Why, if there is —

FIRST MERCHANT. We've travelled a long road, For we are merchants that must tramp the world, And now we look for supper and a fire And a safe corner to count money in.

SHEMUS. I thought you were.... but that's no matter now — There had been words between my wife and me Because I said I would be master here, And ask in what I pleased or who I pleased And so.... but that is nothing to the point, Because it's certain that you are but merchants.

FIRST MERCHANT. We travel for the Master of all merchants.

SHEMUS. Yet if you were that I had thought but now I'd welcome you no less. Be what you please And you'll have supper at the market rate, That means that what was sold for but a penny Is now worth fifty.

(MERCHANTS begin putting money on carpet.)

FIRST MERCHANT. Our Master bids us pay So good a price, that all who deal with us Shall eat, drink, and be merry.

SHEMUS. (to MARY) Bestir yourself, Go kill and draw the fowl, while Teig and I Lay out the plates and make a better fire.

MARY. I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS. Not cook! not cook! Do not be angry. She wants to pay me back Because I struck her in that argument. But she'll get sense again. Since the

dearth came We rattle one on another as though we were Knives thrown into a basket to be cleaned.

MARY. I will not cook for you, because I know In what unlucky shape you sat but now Outside this door.

TEIG. It's this, your honours: Because of some wild words my father said She thinks you are not of those who cast a shadow.

SHEMUS. I said I'd make the devils of the wood Welcome, if they'd a mind to eat and drink; But it is certain that you are men like us.

FIRST MERCHANT. It's strange that she should think we cast no shadow, For there is nothing on the ridge of the world That's more substantial than the merchants are That buy and sell you.

MARY. If you are not demons, And seeing what great wealth is spread out there, Give food or money to the starving poor.

FIRST MERCHANT. If we knew how to find deserving poor We'd do our share.

MARY. But seek them patiently.

FIRST MERCHANT. We know the evils of mere charity.

MARY. Those scruples may befit a common time. I had thought there was a pushing to and fro, At times like this, that overset the scale And trampled measure down.

FIRST MERCHANT. But if already We'd thought of a more prudent way than that?

SECOND MERCHANT. If each one brings a bit of merchandise, We'll give him such a price he never dreamt of.

MARY. Where shall the starving come at merchandise?

FIRST MERCHANT. We will ask nothing but what all men have.

MARY. Their swine and cattle, fields and implements Are sold and gone.

FIRST MERCHANT. They have not sold all yet. For there's a vaporous thing — that may be nothing, But that's the buyer's risk — a second self, They call immortal for a story's sake.

SHEMUS. You come to buy our souls?

TEIG. I'll barter mine. Why should we starve for what may be but nothing?

MARY. Teig and Shemus —

SHEMUS. What can it be but nothing? What has God poured out of His bag but famine? Satan gives money.

TEIG. Yet no thunder stirs.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is a heap for each.

(SHEMUS goes to take money.)

But no, not yet, For there's a work I have to set you to.

SHEMUS. So then you're as deceitful as the rest, And all that talk of buying what's but a vapour Is fancy bred. I might have known as much, Because that's how the trick-o'-the-loop man talks.

FIRST MERCHANT. That’s for the work, each has its separate price; But neither price is paid till the work’s done.

TEIG. The same for me.

MARY. Oh, God, why are you still?

FIRST MERCHANT. You’ve but to cry aloud at every cross-road, At every house door, that we buy men’s souls, And give so good a price that all may live In mirth and comfort till the famine’s done, Because we are Christian men.

SHEMUS. Come, let’s away.

TREIG> I shall keep running till I’ve earned the price.

SECOND MERCHANT. (who has risen and gone towards fire) Stop, for we obey a generous Master, That would be served by Comfortable men. And here’s your entertainment on the road.

(TRIG and SHEMUS have stopped. TEIG takes the money. They go out.)

MARY. Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly. You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

SECOND MERCHANT. Curse to your fill, for saints will have their dreams.

FIRST MERCHANTm Though we’re but vermin that our Master sent To overrun the world, he at the end Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon And quench the stars in the ancestral night.

MARY. God is all powerful.

SECOND MERCHANT. Pray, you shall need Him. You shall eat dock and grass, and dandelion, Till that low threshold there becomes a wall, And when your hands can scarcely drag your body We shall be near you.

(MARY faints.) (The FIRST MERCHANT takes up the carPet, spreads it before the fire and stands in front of it warming his hands.)

FIRST MERCHANT. Our faces go unscratched, For she has fainted. Wring the neck o' that fowl, Scatter the flour and search the shelves for bread. We'll turn the fowl upon the spit and roast it, And eat the supper we were bidden to, Now that the house is quiet, praise our master, And stretch and warm our heels among the ashes.

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

FRONT SCENE. — A wood with perhaps distant view of turreted house at one side, but all in flat colour, without light and shade and against a diafiered or gold background.

COUNTESS CATHLEEN comes in leaning Upon ALEEL's arm. OONA follows them.

CATHLEEN. (Stopping) Surely this leafy corner, where one smells The wild bee's honey, has a story too?

OONA. There is the house at last.

ALEEL. A man, they say, Loved Maeve the Queen of all the invisible host, And died of his love nine centuries ago. And now, when the moon's riding at the full, She leaves her dancers lonely and lies there Upon that level place, and for three days Stretches and sighs and wets her long pale cheeks.

CATHLEEN. So she loves truly.

ALEEL. No, but wets her cheeks, Lady, because she has forgot his name.

CATHLEEN. She'd sleep that trouble away — though it must be A heavy trouble to forget his name — If she had better sense.

OONA. Your own house, lady.

ALEEL. She sleeps high up on wintry Knock-na-rea In an old cairn of stones; while her poor women Must lie and jog in the wave if they would sleep Being water born — yet if she cry their names They run up on the land and dance in the moon Till they are giddy and would love as men do,

And be as patient and as pitiful. But there is nothing that will stop in their heads, They've such poor memories, though they weep for it. Oh, yes, they weep; that's when the moon is full.

CATHLEEN. is it because they have short memories They live so long?

ALEEL. What's memory but the ash That chokes our fires that have begun to sink? And they've a dizzy, everlasting fire.

OONA. There is your own house, lady.

CATHLEEN. Why, that's true, And we'd have passed it without noticing.

ALEEL. A curse upon it for a meddlesome house! Had it but stayed away I would have known What Queen Maeve thinks on when the moon is pinched; And whether now — as in the old days — the dancers Set their brief love on men.

OONA. Rest on my arm. These are no thoughts for any Christian ear.

ALEEL. I am younger, she would be too heavy for you.

(He begins taking his lute out of the bag, CATHLEEN, Who has turned towards OONA, turns back to him.)

This hollow box remembers every foot That danced upon the level grass of the world, And will tell secrets if I whisper to it. (Sings.) Lift up the white knee; That's what they sing, Those young dancers That in a ring Raved but now Of the hearts that break Long, long ago For their sake.

OONA. New friends are sweet.

ALEEL. “But the dance changes.

Lift up the gown, All that sorrow Is trodden down.”

OONA. The empty rattle-pate! Lean on this arm, That I can tell you is a christened arm, And not like some, if we are to judge by speech. But as you please. It is time I was forgot. Maybe it is not on this arm you slumbered When you were as helpless as a worm.

ALEEL. Stay with me till we come to your own house.

CATHLEEN (Sitting down) When I am rested I will need no help.

ALEEL. I thought to have kept her from remembering

The evil of the times for full ten minutes; But now when seven are out you come between.

OONA. Talk on; what does it matter what you say, For you have not been christened?

ALEEL. Old woman, old woman, You robbed her of three minutes peace of mind, And though you live unto a hundred years, And wash the feet of beggars and give alms, And climb Croaghpatrick, you shall not be pardoned.

OONA. How does a man who never was baptized Know what Heaven pardons?

ALEEL. You are a sinful woman

OONA. I care no more than if a pig had grunted.

(Enter CATHLEEN's Steward.)

STEWARD. I am not to blame, for I had locked the gate, The forester's to blame. The men climbed in At the east corner where the elm-tree is.

CATHLEEN. I do not understand you, who has climbed?

STEWARD. Then God be thanked, I am the first to tell you. I was afraid some other of the servants — Though I've been on the watch — had been the first And mixed up truth and lies, your ladyship.

CATHLEEN (rising) Has some misfortune happened?

STEWARD. Yes, indeed. The forester that let the branches lie Against the wall's to blame for everything, For that is how the rogues got into the garden.

CATHLEEN. I thought to have escaped misfortune here. Has any one been killed?

STEWARD. Oh, no, not killed. They have stolen half a cart-load of green cabbage.

CATHLEEN. But maybe they were starving.

STEWARD. That is certain. To rob or starve, that was the choice they had.

CATHLEEN. A learned theologian has laid down That starving men may take what's necessary, And yet be sinless.

OONA. Sinless and a thief There should be broken bottles on the wall.

CATHLEEN. And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul But it's unlike all others in the world, Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none Whose loss were less than irremediable Although it were the wickedest in the world.

(Enter TEIG and SHEMUS.)

STEWARD. What are you running for? Pull off your cap, Do you not see who's there?

SHEMUS. I cannot wait. I am running to the world with the best news That has been brought it for a thousand years.

STEWARD. Then get your breath and speak.

SHEMUS. If you'd my news You'd run as fast and be as out of breath.

TEIG. Such news, we shall be carried on men's shoulders.

SHEMUS. There's something every man has carried with him And thought no more about than if it were A mouthful of the wind; and now it's grown A marketable thing!

TEIG. And yet it seemed As useless as the paring of one's nails.

SHEMUS. What sets me laughing when I think of it, Is that a rogue who's lain in lousy straw, If he but sell it, may set up his coach.

TEIG. (laughing) There are two gentlemen who buy men's souls.

CATHLEEN. O God!

TEIG. And maybe there's no soul at all.

STEWARD. They're drunk or mad.

TEIG. Look at the price they give. (Showing money.)

SHEMUS. (tossing up money) "Go cry it all about the world," they said. "Money for souls, good money for a soul."

CATHLEEN. Give twice and thrice and twenty times their money, And get your souls again. I will pay all.

SHEMUS. Not we! not we! For souls — if there are souls — But keep the flesh out of its merriment. I shall be drunk and merry.

TEIG. Come, let's away.

(He goes.)

CATHLEEN. But there's a world to come.

SHEMUS. And if there is, I'd rather trust myself into the hands That can pay money down than to the hands That have but shaken famine from the bag.

(He goes Out R.)

(lilting) "There's money for a soul, sweet yellow money. There's money for men's souls, good money, money."

CATHLEEN. (to ALEEL) Go call them here again, bring them by force, Beseech them, bribe, do anything you like.

(ALEEL goes.)

And you too follow, add your prayers to his.

(OONA, who has been praying, goes out.)

Steward, you know the secrets of my house. How much have I?

STEWARD. A hundred kegs of gold.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in castles?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in pasture?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in forests?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. Keeping this house alone, sell all I have, Go barter where you please, but come again With herds of cattle and with ships of meal.

STEWARD. God’s blessing light upon your ladyship. You will have saved the land.

CATHLEEN. Make no delay.

(He goes L.)

(ALEEL and OONA return)

CATHLEEN. They have not come; speak quickly.

ALEEL. One drew his knife And said that he would kill the man or woman That stopped his way; and when I would have stopped him He made this stroke at me; but it is nothing.

CATHLEEN. You shall be tended. From this day for ever I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own.

OONA. Their eyes shone like the eyes of birds of prey.

CATHLEEN. Come, follow me, for the earth burns my feet Till I have changed my house to such a refuge That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart, May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us. From this day out I have nothing of my own.

(She goes.)

OONA (taking ALEEL by the arm and as she speaks bandaging his wound) She has found something now to put her hand to, And you and I are of no more account Than flies upon a window-pane in the winter.

(They go out.)

END OF SCENE 2.

SCENE 3

SCENE. — Hall in the house of COUNTESS CATHLEEN. At the Left an oratory with steps leading up to it. At the Right a tapestried wall, more or less repeating the form of the oratory, and a great chair with its back against the wall. In the Centre are two or more arches through which one can see dimly the trees of the garden. CATHLEEN is kneeling in front of the altar in the oratory; there is a hanging lighted lamp over the altar. ALEEL enters.

ALEEL. I have come to bid you leave this castle and fly Out of these woods.

CATHLEEN. What evil is there here? That is not everywhere from this to the sea?

ALEEL. They who have sent me walk invisible.

CATHLEEN. So it is true what I have heard men say, That you have seen and heard what others cannot.

ALEEL. I was asleep in my bed, and while I slept My dream became a fire; and in the fire One walked and he had birds about his head.

CATHLEEN. I have heard that one of the old gods walked so.

ALEEL. It may be that he is angelical; And, lady, he bids me call you from these woods. And you must bring but your old foster-mother, And some few serving men, and live in the hills, Among the sounds of music and the light Of waters, till the evil days are done. For here some terrible death is waiting you, Some unimagined evil, some great darkness That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon Scattered.

CATHLEEN. No, not angelical.

ALEEL. This house You are to leave with some old trusty man, And bid him shelter all that starve or wander While there is food and house room.

CATHLEEN. He bids me go Where none of mortal creatures but the swan Dabbles, and there ‘you would pluck the harp, when the trees Had made a heavy shadow about our door, And talk among the rustling of the reeds, When night hunted the foolish sun away With stillness and pale tapers. No-no-no! I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep Because that life would be most happy, and here I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep Because I had longed to look upon your face, But that a night of prayer has made me weary.

ALEEL (.prostrating himself before her) Let Him that made mankind, the angels and devils And death and plenty, mend what He has made, For when we labour in vain and eye still sees Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN. How would that quiet end?

ALEEL. How but in healing?

CATHLEEN. You have seen my tears And I can see your hand shake on the floor.

ALEEL. (faltering) I thought but of healing. He was angelical.

CATHLEEN (turning away from him) No, not angelical, but of the old gods, Who wander about the world to waken the heart The passionate, proud heart — that all the angels, Leaving nine heavens empty, would rock to sleep.

(She goes to chapel door; ALEEL holds his clasped hands towards her for a moment hesitating, and then lets them fall beside him.)

CATHLEEN. Do not hold out to me beseeching hands. This heart shall never waken on earth. I have sworn, By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced, To pray before this altar until my heart Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

ALEEL. (who has risen) When one so great has spoken of love to one' So little as I, though to deny him love, What can he but hold out beseeching hands, Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly They have overdared?

(He goes towards the door of the hall. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN takes a few steps towards him.)

CATHLEEN. If the old tales are true, Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar-maids; God's procreant waters flowing about your mind Have made you more than kings or queens; and not you But I am the empty pitcher.

ALEEL. Being silent, I have said all, yet let me stay beside you.

CATHLEEN.No, no, not while my heart is shaken. No, But you shall hear wind cry and water cry, And curlews cry, and have the peace I longed for.

ALEEL. Give me your hand to kiss.

CATHLEEN. I kiss your forehead.

And yet I send you from me. Do not speak;

There have been women that bid men to rob

Crowns from the Country-under-Wave or apples

Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all

That they might sift men's hearts and wills,

And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble

That lay a hard task on you, that you go,

And silently, and do not turn your head;

Goodbye; but do not turn your head and look;

Above all else, I would not have you look.

(ALEEL goes.)

I never spoke to him of his wounded hand, And now he is gone.

(She looks out.)

I cannot see him, for all is dark outside. Would my imagination and my heart Were as little shaken as this holy flame!

(She goes slowly into the chapel. The two MERCHANTS enter.) FIRST MERCHANT. Although I bid you rob her treasury, I find you sitting drowsed and motionless, And yet you understand that while it's full She'll bid against us and so bribe the poor That our great Master'll lack his merchandise. You know that she has brought into this house The old and ailing that are pinched the most At such a time and so should be bought

cheap. You've seen us sitting in the house in the wood, While the snails crawled about the window-pane And the mud floor, and not a soul to buy; Not even the wandering fool's nor one of those That when the world goes wrong must rave and talk, Until they are as thin as a cat's ear. But all that's nothing; you sit drowsing there With your back hooked, your chin upon your knees.

SECOND MERCHANT. How could I help it? For she prayed so hard I could not cross the threshold till her lover Had turned her thoughts to dream.

FIRST MERCHANT, Well, well, to labour. There is the treasury door and time runs on.

(SECOND MERCHANT goes Out. FIRST MERCHANT sits cross-legged against a pillar, yawns and stretches.)

FIRST MERCHANT. And so I must endure the weight of the world, Far from my Master and the revelry, That's lasted since — shaped as a worm — he bore The knowledgable pippin in his mouth To the first woman.

(SECOND MERCHANT returns with bags.)

Where are those dancers gone? They knew they were to carry it on their backs.

SECOND MERCHANT. I heard them breathing but a moment since, But now they are gone, being unsteadfast things.

FIRST MERCHANT. They knew their work. It seems that they imagine We'd do such wrong to our great Master's name As to bear burdens on our

backs as men do. I'll call them, and who'll dare to disobey? Come, all you elemental populace From Cruachan and Finbar's ancient house. Come, break up the long dance under the hill, Or if you lie in the hollows of the sea, Leave lonely the long hoarding surges, leave The cymbals of the waves to clash alone, And shaking the sea-tangles from your hair Gather about us.

(The SPIRITS gather under the arches.)

SECOND MERCHANT. They come. Be still a while.

(SPIRITS dance and sing.)

FIRST SPIRIT. (singing) Our hearts are sore, but we come Because we have heard you call.

SECOND SPIRIT. Sorrow has made me dumb.

FIRST SPIRIT. Her shepherds at nightfall Lay many a plate and cup Down by the trodden brink, That when the dance break up We may have meat and drink. Therefore our hearts are sore; And though we have heard and come Our crying filled the shore.

SECOND SPIRIT. Sorrow has made me dumb.

FIRST MERCHANT. What lies in the waves should be indifferent To good and evil, and yet it seems that these, Forgetful of their pure, impartial sea, Take sides with her.

SECOND MERCHANT. Hush, hush, and still your feet. You are not now upon Maeve's dancing-floor.

A SPIRIT. O, look what I have found, a string of pearls!

(They begin taking jewels out of bag.)

SECOND MERCHANT. You must not touch them, put them in the bag, And now take up the bags upon your backs And carry them to Shemus Rua's house On the wood's border.

SPIRITS. No, no, no, no!

FIRST SPIRIT. No, no, let us away; From this we shall not come Cry out to' us who may.

SECOND SPIRIT. Sorrow has made me dumb.

(They go.)

SECOND MERCHANT. They're gone, for little do they care for me, And if I called they would but turn and mock, But you they dare not disobey.

FIRST MERCHANT (rising) These dancers Are always the most troublesome of spirits.

(He comes down the stage and stands facing the arches. He makes a gesture of command. The SPIRITS come back whimpering. They lift the bags and go out. Three speak as they are taking ub the bags.

FIRST SPIRIT. From this day out we'll never dance again.

SECOND SPIRIT. Never again.

THIRD SPIRIT. Sorrow has made me dumb.

SECOND MERCHANT (looking into chapel door) She has heard nothing; she has fallen asleep.

Our lord would be well pleased if we could win her. Now that the winds are heavy with our kind, Might we not kill her, and bear off her spirit Before the mob of angels were astir?

FIRST MERCHANT. If we would win this turquoise for our lord It must go dropping down of its free will But I've a plan.

SECOND MERCHANT. To take her soul to-night?

FIRST MERCHANT. Because I am of the ninth and mightiest hell Where are all kings, I have a plan.

(Voices.)

SECOND MERCHANT. Too late; For somebody is stirring in the house; the noise That the sea creatures made as they came hither, Their singing and their endless chattering, Has waked the house. I hear the chairs pushed back, And many shuffling feet. All the old men and women She's gathered in the house are coming hither.

A VOICE. (within) It was here.

ANOTHER VOICE. No, farther away.

ANOTHER VOICE. It was in the western tower.

ANOTHER VOICE. Come quickly, we will search the western tower.

FIRST MERCHANT. We still have time — they search the distant rooms.

SECOND MERCHANT. Brother, I heard a sound in there — a sound That troubles me.

(Going to the door of the oratory and peering through it.) Upon the altar steps The Countess tosses, murmuring in her sleep A broken Paternoster.

FIRST MERCHANT. Do not fear, For when she has awaked the prayer will cease.

SECOND MERCHANT. What, would you wake her?

FIRST MERCHANT. I will speak with her, And mix with all her thoughts a thought to serve. — Lady, we've news that's crying out for speech.

(CATHLEEN wakes and comes to door of the chapel.)

Cathleen. Who calls?

FIRST MERCHANT. We have brought news.

CATHLEEN. What are you?

FIRST MERCHANT. We are merchants, and we know the book of the world Because we have walked upon its leaves; and there Have read of late matters that much concern you; And noticing the castle door stand open, Came in to find an ear.

CATHLEEN. The door stands open, That no one who is famished or afraid, Despair of help or of a welcome with it. But you have news, you say.

FIRST MERCHANT. We saw a man, Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allen, Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair Head We saw your grain

ships lying all becalmed In the dark night; and not less still than they, Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the sea.

CATHLEEN.. My thanks to God, to Mary and the angels, That I have money in my treasury, And can buy grain from those who have stored it up To prosper on the hunger of the poor. But you've been far and know the signs of things, When will this yellow vapour no more hang And creep about the fields, and this great heat Vanish away, and grass show its green shoots?

FIRST MERCHANT. There is no sign of change — day copies day, Green things are dead — the cattle too are dead Or dying — and on all the vapour hangs, And fattens with disease and glows with heat. In you is all the hope of all the land.

CATHLEEN. And heard you of the demons who buy souls?

FIRST MERCHANT. There are some men who hold they have wolves' heads, And say their limbs — dried by the infinite flame — Have all the speed of storms; others, again, Say they are gross and little; while a few Will have it they seem much as mortals are, But tall and brown and travelled — like us — lady, Yet all agree a power is in their looks That makes men bow, and flings a casting-net About their souls, and that all men would go And barter those poor vapours, were it not You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN. Praise be to God, to Mary, and the angels That I am wealthy! Wherefore do they sell?

FIRST MERCHANT. As we came in at the great door we saw Your porter sleeping in his niche — a soul Too little to be worth a hundred pence, And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns. But for a soul like yours, I heard them say, They would give five hundred thousand crowns and more.

CATHLEEN. How can a heap of crowns pay for a soul? Is the green grave so terrible a thing?

FIRST MERCHANT. Some sell because the money gleams, and some Because they are in terror of the grave, And some because their neighbours sold before, And some because there is a kind of joy In casting hope away, in losing joy, In ceasing all resistance, in at last Opening one's arms to the eternal flames.

In casting all sails out upon the wind; To this — full of the gaiety of the lost — Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN. There is something, Merchant, in your voice That makes me fear. When you were telling how A man may lose his soul and lose his God Your eyes were lighted up, and when you told How my poor money serves the people, both — Merchants forgive me — seemed to smile.

FIRST MERCHANT. Man's sins Move us to laughter only; we have seen So many lands and seen so many men. How strange that all these people should be swung As on a lady's shoe-string, — under them The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

CATHLEEN. There is a something in you that I fear; A something not of us; but were you not born In some most distant corner of the world?

(The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listening at the door, comes forward, and as he comes a sound of voices and feet is heard.)

SECOND MERCHANT. Away now — they are in the passage — hurry, For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT. Farewell; for we must ride Many a mile before the morning come; Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

(They go out. A number of PEASANTs enter by other door.)

FIRST PEASANT. Forgive us, lady, but we heard a noise.

SECOND PEASANT. We sat by the fireside telling vanities.

FIRST PEASANT. We heard a noise, but though we have searched the house We have found nobody.

CATHLEEN. You are too timid. For now you are safe from all the evil times. There is no evil that can find you here.

OONA (entering hurriedly) Ochone! Ochone! The treasure room is broken in, The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

(PEASANTS raise a lamentable cry.)

CATHLEEN. Be silent.

(The cry ceases.)

Have you seen nobody?

OONA Ochone! That my good mistress should lose all this money.

CATHLEEN. Let those among you — not too old to ride — Get horses and search all the country round, I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

(A man with keys at his girdle has come in while she speaks. There is a general murmur of The Porter! the porter!")

PORTER. Demons were here. I sat beside the door In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by, Whispering with human voices.

OLD PEASANT. God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN. Old man, old man, He never closed a door Unless one opened. I am desolate, For a most sad resolve wakes in my heart But I have still my faith; therefore be silent For surely He does not forsake the world, But stands before it modelling in the clay And moulding there His image. Age by age The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard For its old, heavy, dull and shapeless ease; But sometimes — though His hand is on it still — It moves awry and demon hordes are born.

(PEASANTS cross themselves.)

Yet leave me now, for I am desolate, I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

(She comes from the oratory door.)

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take These two — the larder and the dairy keys.

(To the PORTER.)

But take you this. It opens the small room Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore, Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal. The book of cures is on the upper shelf.

PORTER. Why do you do this, lady; did you see Your coffin in a dream?

CATHLEEN. Ah, no, not that. A sad resolve wakes in me. I have heard A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels, And I must go down, down — I know not where — Pray for all men and women mad from famine; Pray, you good neighbours.

(The PEASANTS all kneel. COUNTESS CATHLEEN ascends the steps to the door of the oratory, and turning round stands there motionless for a little, and then cries in a loud voice:)

Mary, Queen of angels, And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

END OF SCENE 3.

SCENE 4

SCENE. — A wood near the Castle, as in Scene 2. The SPIRITS pass one by one carrying bags.

FIRST SPIRIT. I'll never dance another step, not one.

SECOND SPIRIT. Are all the thousand years of dancing done?

THIRD SPIRIT. How can we dance after so great a sorrow?

FOURTH SPIRIT. But how shall we remember it to-morrow?

FIFTH SPIRIT. To think of all the things that we forget.

SIXTH SPIRIT. That's why we groan and why our lids are wet.

(The SPIRITS go out. A group Of PEASANTS Pass.)

FIRST PEASANT. I have seen silver and copper, but not gold.

SECOND PEASANT. It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT. It's beautiful. The most beautiful thing under the sun, That's what I've heard.

THIRD PEASANT. I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT. I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT. But doesn't a gold piece glitter like the sun? That's what my father, who'd seen better days, Told me when I was but a little boy —

So high — so high, it's shining like the sun, Round and shining, that is what he said.

SECOND PEASANT. There's nothing in the world it cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT. They've bags and bags of it.

(They go out. The two MERCHANTS follow silently.)

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

SCENE. — The house of SHEMUS RUA. There is an alcove at the back with curtains; in it a bed, and on the bed is the body of MARY with candles round it. The two MERCHANTS while they speak put a large book upon a table, arrange money, and so on.

FIRST MERCHANT. Thanks to that lie I told about her ships And that about the herdsman lying sick, We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT. What has she in her coffers now but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT. When the night fell and I had shaped myself Into the image of the man-headed owl, I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal, And saw with all their canvas full of wind And rushing through the parti-coloured sea Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal. They’re but three days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT. When the dew rose I hurried in like feathers to the east, And saw nine hundred oxen driven through Meath With goads of iron, They’re but three days from us.

FIRST MERCHANT. Three days for traffic.

(PEASANTS crowd in with TEIG and SHEMUS.)

SHEMUS. Come in, come in, you are welcome. That is my wife. She mocked at my great masters, And would not deal with them. Now there she is; She does not even know she was a fool, So great a fool she was.

TEIG. She would not eat One crumb of bread bought with our master's money, But lived on nettles, dock, and dandelion.

SHEMUS. There's nobody could put into her head

That Death is the worst thing can happen us. Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank With all the lies that she had heard in chapel. Draw to the curtain.

(TEIG draws it.)

You'll not play the fool While these good gentlemen are there to save you.

SECOND MERCHANT. Since the drought came they drift about in a throng, Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds. Come, deal — come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT. Who will come deal with us?

SHEMUS. They are out of spirit, Sir, with lack of food, Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these; The others will gain courage in good time.

MIDDLE-AGED-MAN. I come to deal — if you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT (reading in a book) John Maher, a man of substance, with dull mind, And quiet senses and unventurous heart. The angels think him safe." Two hundred crowns, All for a soul, a little breath of wind.

THE MAN. I ask three hundred crowns. You have read there That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is something more writ here — ”often at night He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor, And thereon wonders if there’s any man That he could rob in safety.”

A PEASANT. Who’d have thought it? And I was once alone with him at midnight.

ANOTHER PEASANT. I will not trust my mother after this.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is this crack in you — two hundred crowns.

A PEASANT. That’s plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT. I’d give him nothing.

SHEMUS. You’ll get no more — so take what’s offered you.

(A general murmur, during which the MIDDLE-AGED-MAN takes money, and slips into background, where he sinks on to a seat.)

FIRST MERCHANT. Has no one got a better soul than that? If only for the credit of your parishes, Traffic with us.

A WOMAN. What will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT (reading in book) “Soft, handsome, and still young “ — not much, I think.” It’s certain that the man she’s married to Knows nothing of what’s hidden in the jar Between the hour-glass and the pepper-pot.”

THE WOMAN. The scandalous book.

FIRST MERCHANT. “Nor how when he’s away At the horse fair the hand that wrote what’s hid Will tap three times upon the window-pane.”

THE WOMAN. And if there is a letter, that is no reason Why I should have less money than the others.

FIRST MERCHANT. You’re almost safe, I give you fifty crowns

(She turns to go.)

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS. Woman, have sense-come, Come. Is this a time to haggle at the price? There, take it up. There, there. That’s right.

(She takes them and goes into the crowd.)

FIRST MERCHANT. Come, deal, deal, deal. It is but for charity We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins Made them our Master’s long before we came.

(ALEEL enters.)

ALEEL. Here, take my soul, for I am tired of it. I do not ask a price.

SHEMUS. Not ask a price? How can you sell your soul without a price? I would not listen to his broken wits; His love for Countess Cathleen has so crazed him He hardly understands what he is saying.

ALEEL. The trouble that has come on Countess Cathleen, The sorrow that is in her wasted face, The burden in her eyes, have broke my wits, And yet I know I’d have you take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL. No, but you must. Seeing it cannot help her I have grown tired of it.

FIRST MERCHANT. Begone from me I may not touch it.

ALEEL. Is your power so small? And must I bear it with me all my days? May you be scorned and mocked!

FIRST MERCHANT. Drag him away. He troubles me.

(TEIG and SHEMUS lead ALEEL into the crowd.)

SECOND MERCHANT. His gaze has filled me, brother, With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT. Lean forward And kiss the circlet where my Master's lips Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither; You shall have peace once more.

(SECOND MERCHANT kisses the gold circlet that is about the head of the FIRST MERCHANT.) I, too, grow weary, But there is something moving in my heart Whereby I know that what we seek the most Is drawing near — our labour will soon end. Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; are you all dumb? What, will you keep me from our ancient home And from the eternal revelry?

SECOND MERCHANT. Deal, deal.

SHEMUS. They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT. I offer this great price: a-thousand crowns For an old woman who was always ugly.

(An Old PEASANT WOMAN comes forward, and he takes up a book and reads.)

There is but little set down here against her. “She has stolen eggs and fowl when times were bad, But when the times grew better has confessed it; She never missed her chapel of a Sunday And when she could, paid dues.” Take up your money.

OLD WOMAN. God bless you, Sir.

(She screams.)

Oh, sir, a pain went through me!

FIRST MERCHANT. That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

(Murmur among the PEASANTS, who shrink back from her as she goes out.)

A PEASANT. How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT. And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT. I tell you there is no such place as hell.

FIRST MERCHANT. Can such a trifle turn you from your profit? Come, deal; come, deal.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT. I bought your soul, and there's no sense in fear Now the soul's gone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN. Give me my soul again.

WOMAN (going on her knees and clinging to MERCHANT) And take this money too, and give me mine.

SECOND MERCHANT. Bear bastards, drink or follow some wild fancy; For sighs and cries are the soul's work, And you have none.

(Throws the woman off.)

PEASANT. Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Come quickly; if that woman had not screamed I would have lost my soul.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Come, come away.

(They turn to door, but are stopped by shouts of "Countess Cathleen! Countess Cathleen!")

CATHLEEN (entering) And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT. In spite of you. What brings you here, saint with the sapphire eyes?

CATHLEEN. I come to barter a soul for a great price.

SECOND MERCHANT. What matter, if the soul be worth the price?

CATHLEEN. The people starve, therefore the people go Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them And it is in my ears by night and day, And I would have five hundred thousand crowns That I may feed them till the dearth go by.

FIRST MERCHANT.. It may be the soul's worth it.

CATHLEEN. There is more: The souls that you have bought must be set free.

FIRST MERCHANT. We know of but one soul that's worth the price.

CATHLEEN. Being my own it seems a priceless thing.

SECOND MERCHANT. You offer us —

CATHLEEN. I offer my own soul.

A PEASANT. Do not, do not, for souls the like of ours Are not precious to God as your soul is. O! what would Heaven do without you, lady?

ANOTHER PEASANT. Look how their claws clutch in their leathern gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT. Five hundred thousand crowns; we give the price. The gold is here; the souls even while you speak Have slipped out of our bond, because your face Has shed a light on them and filled their hearts. But you must sign, for we omit no form In buying a soul like yours.

SECOND MERCHANT. Sign with this quill. It was a feather growing on the cock That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master, And all who use it have great honour in Hell.

(CATHLEEN leans forward to sign.)

ALEEL (rushing forward and snatching the parchment from her) Leave all things to the builder of the heavens.

CATHLEEN. I have no thoughts; I hear a cry — a cry.

ALEEL (casting the parchment on the ground) I have seen a vision under a green hedge, A hedge of hips and haws-men yet shall hear The Archangels rolling Satan's empty skull Over the mountain-tops.

FIRST MERCHANT. Take him away.

(TEIG and SHEMUS drag him roughly away so that he falls upon the floor among the PEASANTS. CATHLEEN picks up parchment and signs, then turns towards the PEASANTS.)

CATHLEEN. Take up the money, and now come with me; When we are far from this polluted place I will give everybody money enough.

(She goes out, the PEASANTS crowding round her and kissing her dress. ALEEL and the two MERCHANTS are left alone.)

SECOND MERCHANT. We must away and wait until she dies, Sitting above her tower as two grey owls, Waiting as many years as may be, guarding Our precious jewel; waiting to seize her soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We need but hover over her head in the air, For she has only minutes. When she signed Her heart began to break. Hush, hush, I hear The brazen door of Hell move on its hinges, And the eternal revelry float hither To hearten us.

SECOND MERCHANT. Leap feathered on the air And meet them with her soul caught in your claws.

(They rush Out. ALEEL crawls into the middle of the room. The twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on. There is a distant muttering of thunder and a sound of rising storm.)

ALEEL. The brazen door stands wide, and Balor comes Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of old Turned gods to stone; Barach, the traitor, comes And the lascivious race, Cailitin, That cast a druid weakness and decay Over Sualtem's and old Dectera's child; And that great king Hell first took hold upon When he killed Naisi and broke Deirdre's heart, And all their heads are twisted to one side, For when they lived they warred on beauty and peace With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness. (He moves about as though the air was full of spirits. OONA enters.)

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA. Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment Her hand was laid upon my hand it trembled, And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL. Cathleen has chosen other friends than us, And they are rising through the hollow world. Demons are out, old heron.

OONA. God guard her soul.

ALEEL. She's bartered it away this very hour, As though we two were never in the world. And they are rising through the hollow world.

(He Points downward.)

First, Orchill, her pale, beautiful head alive,

Her body shadowy as vapour drifting

Under the dawn, for she who awoke desire

Has but a heart of blood when others die;

About her is a vapoury multitude

Of women alluring devils with soft laughter

Behind her a host heat of the blood made sin,

But all the little pink-white nails have grown

To be great talons.

(He seizes OONA and drags her into the middle of the room and Points downward with vehement gestures. The wind roars.)

They begin a song And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA (casting herself face downwards on the floor) O, Maker of all, protect her from the demons, And if a soul must need be lost, take mine.

(ALEEL kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.)

OONA. O, that so many pitchers of rough clay Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

(She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.)

A PEASANT. We were under the tree where the path turns, When she grew pale as death and fainted away. And while we bore her hither cloudy gusts Blackened the world and shook us on our feet Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

(One who is near the door draws the bolt.)

CATHLEEN. O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm Is dragging me away.

(OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.)

PEASANT. Hush!

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN Hush!

CATHLEEN (half rising) Lay all the bags of money in a heap, And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out To every man and woman: judge, and give According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN. And will she give Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints, Let us and ours be lost so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN. Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel; I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes Upon the nest under the eave, before She wander the loud waters. Do not weep Too great a while, for there is many a candle On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel, Who sang about the dancers of the woods, That know not the hard burden of the world, Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell And farewell, Oona, you who played with me, And bore me in your arms about the house When I was but a child and therefore happy, Therefore happy, even like those that dance. The storm is in my hair and I must go.

(She dies.)

OONA. Bring me the looking-glass.

(A WOMAN brings it to her out of the inner room. OONA holds it over the lips Of CATHLEEN. All is silent for a moment. And then she speaks in a half scream:)

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT. She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT. She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN. The little plant I love is broken in two.

(ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon the floor so that it is broken in many pieces.)

ALEEL. I shatter you in fragments, for the face That brimmed you up with beauty is no more: And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful words Made you a living spirit has passed away And left you but a ball of passionate dust. And you, proud earth and plumy sea, fade out! For you may hear no more her faltering feet, But are left lonely amid the clamorous war Of angels upon devils.

(He stands up; almost every one is kneeling, but it has grown so dark that only confused forms can be seen.)

And I who weep Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change, And have no excellent hope but the great hour When you shall plunge headlong through bottomless space.

(A flash of lightning followed immediately by thunder.)

A PEASANT WOMAN. Pull him upon his knees before his curses Have plucked thunder and lightning on our heads.

ALEEL. Angels and devils clash in the middle air, And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.

(A flash of lightning followed immediately by thunder.)

Yonder a bright spear, cast out of a sling, Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark clans Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.

(Everything is lost in darkness.)

AN OLD MAN. The Almighty wrath at our great weakness and sin Has blotted out the world and we must die.

(The darkness is broken by a visionary light. The PEASANTS seem to be kneeling upon the rocky slope of a mountain, and vapour full of storm and ever-changing light is sweeping above them and behind them. Half in the light, haff in the shadow, stand armed angels. Their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dinted. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The PEASANTS cast themselves on the ground.)

ALEEL. Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell, But speak to me, whose mind is smitten of God, That it may be no more with mortal things, And tell of her who lies there.

(He seizes one of the angels.)

Till you speak You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL. The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide. And she is passing to the floor of peace, And Mary of the seven times wounded heart Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair Has fallen on her face; The Light of Lights Looks always on the motive, not the deed, The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

(ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.)

OONA. Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace That I would die and go to her I love; The years like great black oxen tread the world, And God the herdsman goads them on behind, And I am broken by their passing feet.

(A sound of far-off horns seems to come from the heart of the Light. The vision melts away, and the forms of the kneeling PEASANTS appear faintly in the darkness.)

NOTES

I found the story of the Countess Cathleen in what professed to be a collection of Irish folk-lore in an Irish newspaper some years ago. I wrote to the compiler, asking about its source, but got no answer, but have since heard that it was translated from Les Matin`ees de Timoth`e Trimm a good many years ago, and has been drifting about the Irish press ever since. L`eo Lesp`es gives it as an Irish story, and though the editor of Folklore has kindly advertised for information, the only Christian variant I know of is a Donegal tale, given by Mr. Larminie in his West Irish Folk Tales and Romances, of a woman who goes to hell for ten years to save her husband, and stays there another ten, having been granted permission to carry away as many souls as could cling to her skirt. L`eo Lesp`es may have added a few details, but I have no doubt of the essential antiquity of what seems to me the most impressive form of one of the supreme parables of the world. The parable came to the Greeks in the sacrifice of Alcestis, but her sacrifice was less overwhelming, less apparently irremediable. L`eo Lesp`es tells the story as follows: —

Ce que je vais vous dire est un r`ecit du car`eme Irlandais. Le boiteux, l'aveugle, le paralytique des rues de Dublin ou de Limerick, vous le diraient mieux que moi, cher lecteur, si vous alliez le leur demander, un sixpense d'argent `a la main.-Il n'est pas une jeune fille catholique `a laquelle on ne Fait appris pendant les jours de pr`eparation `a la communion sainte, pas un berger des bords de la Blackwater qui ne le puisse redire `a la veill`ee.

Il y a bien longtemps qu'il apparut tout-`a-coup dans la vielle Irlande deux marchands inconnus dont personne n'avait oui parler, et qui parlaient n`eanmoins avec la plus grande perfection la langue du pays. Leurs cheveux

`etaient noirs et ferr`es avec de l'or et leurs robes d'une grande magnificence.

Tous deux semblaient avoir le m`eme age; ils paraissaient `etre des hommes de cinquante ans, car leur barbe grisormait un peu.

Or, `a cette `epoque, comme aujourd'hui, l'Irlande `etait pauvre, car le soleil avait `et`e rare, et des r`ecoltes presque nulles. Les indigents ne savaient `a quel sainte se vouer, et la mis`ere devenai de plus en plus terrible.

Dans l'h`otellerie o`u descendirent les marchands fastueux on chercha `a p`en`etrer leurs desseins: mais cc fut en vain, ils demeur`erent silencieux et discrets.

Et pendant qu'ils demeur`erent dans l'h`otellerie, ils ne cess`erent de compter et de recompter des sacs de pi`eces d'or, dont la vive clart`e s'apercevait `a travers les vitres du logis.

Gentlemen, leur dit l'h`otesse un jour, d'o`u vient que vous `etes si opulents, et que, venus pour secourir la mis`ere publique, vous ne fassiez pas de bonnes oeuvres?

-Belle h`otesse, r`epondit l'un d'eux, nous n'avons pas voulu aller au-devant d'infortunes honorables, dans la crainte d'`etre tromp`es par des mis`eres fictives: que la douleur frappe `a la porte, nous ouvrirons.

Le lendemain, quand on sut qu'il existait deux opulents `etrangers pr`ets `a prodiguer l'or, la foule assi`egea leur logis; mais les figures des gens qui en sortaient `etaient bien diverses. Les uns avaient la fiert`e dans le regard, les autres portaient la honte au front. Les deux trafiquants achetaient des `ames

pour le d`emon. L’`ame d’un vieillard valait vingt pi`eces d’or, pas un penny de plus; car Satan avait eu le temps d’y former hypoth`eque. L’`ame d’une `pouse en valait cinquante quand elle `etait jolie, ou cent quand elle `etait laide. L’`Ame d’une jeune fille se payait des prix fous: les fleurs les plus belles et les plus pures sont les plus ch`eres.

Pendant ce temps, il existait dans la ville un ange de beaut`e, la comtesse Ketty O’Connor. Elle `etait l’idole du peuple, et la providence des indigents. D`es qu’elle eut appris que des m`ecr`eants profitaient de la mis`ere publique pour d`erober des coeurs `a Dieu, elle fit appeler son majordome.

— Master Patrick, lui dit elle, combien ai-je de pi`eces d’or dans mon coffre?

— Cent mille.

— Combien de bijoux?

— Pour autant d’argent.

— Combien de ch`ateaux, de bois et de terres?

— Pour le double de ces sommes.

— Eh bien! Patrick, vendez tout cc qui n’est pas or et apportez-m’en le montant. je ne veux garder `a moi que ce castel et le champs qui l’entoure.

Deux jours apr`es, les ordres de la pieuse Ketty `etaient ex`ecues et le tr`esor `etait distribu`e aux pauvres au fur et `a mesure de leurs besoins.

Ceci ne faisait pas le compte, dit la tradition, des commisvoyageurs du malin esprit, qui ne trouvaient plus d''ames `a acheter.

Aides par un valet infame, ils p`en`etr`erent dans la retraite de la noble dame et lui d`erob`erent le reste de son tr`esor... en vain lutta-t-elle de toutes ses forces pour sauver le contenu de son coffre, les larrons diaboliques furent les plus forts. Si Ketty avait eu les moyens de faire un signe de croix, ajoute la l`egende Irlandaise, elle les eut mis en fuite, mais ses mains `etaient captives-Le larcin fut effectu`e.

Alors les pauvres sollicit`erent en vain pr`es de Ketty d`epouill`ee, elle ne pouvait plus secourir leur mis`ere;-elle les abandonnait `a la tentation. Pourtant il n'y avait plus que huit jours `a passer pour que les grains et les fourrages arrivassent en abondance des pays d'Orient. Mais, huit jours, c''etait un si`ecle: huit jours n`ecessitaient une somme immense pour subvenir aux exigences de la disette, et les pauvres allaient ou expirer dans les angoisses de la faim, ou, reniant les saintes maximes de l'Evangile, vendre `a vil prix leur `ame, le plus beau pr`esent de la munificence du Seigneur toutpuissant.

Et Ketty n'avait plus une obole, car elle avait abandonn`e son ch`ateaux aux malheureux.

Elle passa douze heures dans les larmes et le deuil, arrachant ses cheveux couleur de soleil et meurtrissant son sein couleur du lis: puis elle se leva r`esolue, anim`ee par un vif sentiment de d`esespoir.

Elle se rendit chez les marchands d''ames.

— Que voulez-vous? dirent ils.

— Vous achetez des `ames?

— Oui, un peu malgr`e vous, n’est ce pas, sainte aux yeux de sapbir?

— Aujourd’hui je viens vous proposer un march`e, reprit elle.

— Lequel?

— J’ai une `ame `a vendre; mais elle est ch`ere.

— Qu’importe si elle est pr`ecieuse? L’`ame, comme le diamant, s’appr`ecie `a sa blancheur.

— C’est la mienne, dit Ketty.

Les deux envoy`es de Satan tressaillirent, Leurs griffes s’allong`erent sous leurs gants de cuir; leurs yeux gris `etincel`erent: — l’`ame, pure, immacul`ee, virginale de Ketty c’`etait une acquisition inappr`eciable.

— Gentille dame, combien voulez-vouz?

— Cent cinquante mille `ecus d’or.

— C’est fait, dirent les marchands: et ils tendirent `a Ketty un parchemin cachet`e de noir, qu’elle signa en frissonnant.

La somme lui fut compt`ee.

Des qu’elle fut rentr`ee, elle dit au majordome:

— Tenez, distribuez ceci. Avec la somme que je vous donne les pauvres attendront la huitaine n`ecessaire et pas une de leurs `ames ne sera livr`ee au d`emon.

Puis elle s’enferma et recommanda qu’on ne vint pas la d`eranger.

Trois jours se pass`erent; elle n’appela pas; elle ne sortit pas.

Quand on ouvrit sa porte, on la trouva raide et froide: elle `etait morte de douleur.

Mais la vente de cette `ame si adorable dans sa charit`e fut d`eclar`ee nulle par le Seigneur: car elle avait sauv`e ses concitoyens de la morte `eternelle.

Apr`es la huitaine, des vaisseaux nombreux amen`erent l’Irlande affam`ee d’immenses provisions de grains.

La famine n’`etait plus possible. Quant aux marchands, ils disparurent de leur h`otellerie, sans qu’on s`ut jamais ce qu’ils `etaient devenus.

Toutefois, les p`echeurs de la Blackwater pr`etendent qu’ils sont enchain`es dans une prison souterraine par ordre de Lucifer jusqu’au moment o`u ils pourront livrer l’`ame de Ketty qui leur a `echapp`e. je vous dis la l`egende telle que je la sais.

-Mais les pauvres l’ont racont`e d’`age en `age et les enfants de Cork et de Dublin chantent encore la ballade dont voici les derniers couplets:-

Pour sauver les pauvres qu’elle aime Ketty donna Son esprit, sa croyance m`eme Satan paya Cette `ame au d`evoument sublime, En `ecus d’or, Disons pour racheter son crime, Confiteor.

Mais l’ange qui se fit coupable Par charit`e

Au s`ejour d’amour ineffable Est remont`e. Satan vaincu n’eut pas de prise

Sur ce coeur d’or; Chantons sous la nef de l’`eglise, Confiteor.

N’est ce pas que ce r`ecit, n`e de l’imagination des po`etes catholiques de la verte Erin, est une V`eritable r`ecit de car`eme?

The Countess Cathleen was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkinson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as The Countess Kathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss

Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences — even at the Abbey Theatre — are almost ignorant of Irish mythology or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the prosceniurn and have a flight of steps at one side up which the Angel comes, crossing towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the balcony which throw their lights into the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary. The room at Shemus Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain-a colour which becomes full of rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The two or more arches in the third scene permit the use of a gauze. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play when played without interval in this way lasts a little over an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows:-

(MERCHANTS rush out. ALEEL crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.)

ALEEL. They're rising up-they're rising through the earth, Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial, And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air. But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round, Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

He moves about as though the air was full of spirits. OONA enters.)

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA. Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled. And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL. Cathleen has chosen other friends than us, And they are rising through the hollow world. Demons are out, old heron.

OONA. God guard her soul.

ALEEL. She's bartered it away this very hour, As though we two were never in the world.

(He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.)

OONA. O, that so many pitchers of rough clay Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

(She kisses the hands Of CATHLEEN.)

A PEASANT. We were under the tree where the path turns When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN. O! hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm is dragging me away.

(OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.)

PEASANTS. Hush!

PEASANTS Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN. Hush!

CATHLEEN. (half rising) Lay all the bags of money in a heap, And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out To every man and woman: judge, and give According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN. And will she give Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints, Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN. Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel; I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes Upon the nest under the eave, before She wander the loud waters. Do not weep Too great a while, for there is many a candle On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel, Who sang about the dancers of the woods, That know not the hard burden of the world, Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell And farewell, Oona, you who played with me

And bore me in your arms about the house When I was but a child-and therefore happy, Therefore happy even like those that dance. The storm is in my hair and I must go.

(She dies.)

OONA. Bring me the looking-glass.

(A WOMAN brings it to her out of inner room. OONA holds glass over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is Silent for a moment, then she speaks in a half-scream.)

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT. She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT. She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN. The little plant I loved is broken in two.

(ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon floor, so that it is broken in many pieces.)

ALEEL. I shatter you in fragments, for the face That brimmed you up with beauty is no more; And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror Are but a ball of passionate dust again! And level earth and plumy sea, rise up! And haughty sky, fall down!

A PEASANT WOMAN. Pull him upon his knees, His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL. Angels and devils clash in the middle air, And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms. Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye!

(A winged ANGEL, carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the R. with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The ANGEL is about to pass out to the L. when ALEEL speaks. The ANGEL Stops a moment and turns.)

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell, But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God, That it may be no more with mortal things: And tell of her who lies there.

(The ANGEL turns again and is about to go, but is seized by ALEEL.)

Till you speak You shall not drift into eternity. ANGEL. The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide. And she is passing to the floor of peace, And Mary of the seven times wounded heart Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights Looks always on the motive, not the deed, The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

(ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.)

OONA. Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace.

That I would die and go to her I love, The years like great black oxen tread the world, And God the herdsman goads them on behind, And I am broken by their passing feet.

The Land of Heart's Desire

Yeats' second play was first performed in the spring of 1894, at the Avenue Theatre in London, where it ran for six weeks, marking the first professional performance of one of his plays.

It concerns themes of age and thwarted aspirations, with the narrative portraying a faery child encountering the newlyweds Shawn and Maire Bruin at their home, shared with Maurteen Bruin and Bridget Bruin, Shawn's parents. The child, who at first is thought to be of gentle birth, denounces God and shocks Father Hart with her blasphemous thoughts. Shawn implores the previously languid Maire to remain in the real world, but she dies in his arms, surrendering herself to the laughter and eternal, youthful dance of the otherworld, and to the seductive draw of immortality and mindless joy.

Avenue Theatre, London, c.1895

O Rose, thou art sick.

William Blake.

TO
FLORENCE FARR

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Maurteen Bruin
Bridget Bruin
Shawn Bruin
Mary Bruin
Father Hart
A Faery Child

The Scene is laid in the Barony of Kilmacowen, in the County of Sligo, and at a remote time.

The Land of Heart's Desire

Scene. — *A room with a hearth on the floor in the middle of a deep alcove to the Right. There are benches in the alcove and a table; and a crucifix on the wall. The alcove is full of a glow of light from the fire. There is an open door facing the audience to the Left, and to the left of this a bench. Through the door one can see the forest. It is night, but the moon or a late sunset glimmers through the trees and carries the eye far off into a vague, mysterious world.* MAURTEEN BRUIN, SHAWN BRUIN, *and* BRIDGET BRUIN *sit in the alcove at the table or about the fire. They are dressed in the costume of some remote time, and near them sits an old priest*, FATHER HART. *He may be dressed as a friar. There is food and drink upon the table*. MARY BRUIN *stands by the door reading a book. If she looks up she can see through the door into the wood.*

BRIDGET

Because I bid her clean the pots for supper
She took that old book down out of the thatch;
She has been doubled over it ever since.
We should be deafened by her groans and moans
Had she to work as some do, Father Hart;
Get up at dawn like me and mend and scour
Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like you,
The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN

Mother, you are too cross.

BRIDGET

You've married her,
And fear to vex her and so take her part.

MAURTEEN (*to* FATHER HART)

It is but right that youth should side with youth;
She quarrels with my wife a bit at times,
And is too deep just now in the old book!
But do not blame her greatly; she will grow
As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
When but the moons of marriage dawn and die
For half a score of times.

FATHER HART

Their hearts are wild,
As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET

She would not mind the kettle, milk the cow,
Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

SHAWN

Mother, if only — —

MAURTEEN

Shawn, this is half empty;
Go, bring up the best bottle that we have.

FATHER HART

I never saw her read a book before,
What can it be?

MAURTEEN (*to* SHAWN)

What are you waiting for?
You must not shake it when you draw the cork;
It's precious wine, so take your time about it.

(*To Priest.*) (SHAWN *goes*.)

There was a Spaniard wrecked at Ocris Head,
When I was young, and I have still some bottles.
He cannot bear to hear her blamed; the book
Has lain up in the thatch these fifty years;
My father told me my grandfather wrote it,
And killed a heifer for the binding of it —
But supper's spread, and we can talk and eat
It was little good he got out of the book,
Because it filled his house with rambling fiddlers,
And rambling ballad-makers and the like.
The griddle-bread is there in front of you.
Colleen, what is the wonder in that book,
That you must leave the bread to cool? Had I
Or had my father read or written books

There were no stocking stuffed with yellow guineas
To come when I am dead to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART

You should not fill your head with foolish dreams.
What are you reading?

MARY

How a Princess Edane,
A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May Eve like this,
And followed half awake and half asleep,
Until she came into the Land of Faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue.
And she is still there, busied with a dance
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,
Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top.

MAURTEEN

Persuade the colleen to put down the book;
My grandfather would mutter just such things,
And he was no judge of a dog or a horse,
And any idle boy could blarney him;
Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART

Put it away, my colleen;
God spreads the heavens above us like great wings
And gives a little round of deeds and days,
And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,
And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,
Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes
Half shuddering and half joyous from God's peace;
And it was some wrecked angel, blind with tears,
Who flattered Edane's heart with merry words.
My colleen, I have seen some other girls
Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
And they grew like their neighbours and were glad
In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes;
For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age bring the red flare again.

MAURTEEN

That's true — but she's too young to know it's true.

BRIDGET

She's old enough to know that it is wrong
To mope and idle.

MAURTEEN

I've little blame for her;
She's dull when my big son is in the fields,
And that and maybe this good woman's tongue
Have driven her to hide among her dreams
Like children from the dark under the bed-clothes.

BRIDGET

She'd never do a turn if I were silent.

MAURTEEN

And maybe it is natural upon May Eve
To dream of the good people. But tell me, girl,
If you've the branch of blessed quicken wood
That women hang upon the post of the door
That they may send good luck into the house?
Remember they may steal new-married brides
After the fall of twilight on May Eve,
Or what old women mutter at the fire
Is but a pack of lies.

FATHER HART

It may be truth.
We do not know the limit of those powers
God has permitted to the evil spirits
For some mysterious end. You have done right (*to* MARY);
It's well to keep old innocent customs up.

(MARY BRUIN *has taken a bough of quicken wood from a seat and hung it on a nail in the door-post. A girl child strangely dressed, perhaps in faery green, comes out of the wood and takes it away*.)

MARY

I had no sooner hung it on the nail
Before a child ran up out of the wind;
She has caught it in her hand and fondled it;
Her face is pale as water before dawn.

FATHER HART

Whose child can this be?

MAURTEEN

No one's child at all.
She often dreams that some one has gone by,
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

MARY

They have taken away the blessed quicken wood,
They will not bring good luck into the house;
Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God?

FATHER HART

Colleen, they are the children of the fiend,
And they have power until the end of Time,

When God shall fight with them a great pitched battle
And hack them into pieces.

MARY

He will smile,
Father, perhaps, and open His great door.

FATHER HART

Did but the lawless angels see that door
They would fall, slain by everlasting peace;
And when such angels knock upon our doors,
Who goes with them must drive through the same storm.

(*A thin old arm comes round the door-post and knocks and beckons. It is clearly seen in the silvery light.* MARY BRUIN *goes to door and stands in it for a moment*. MAURTEEN BRUIN *is busy filling* FATHER HART'S *plate*. BRIDGET BRUIN *stirs the fire*.)

MARY (*coming to table*)

There's somebody out there that beckoned me
And raised her hand as though it held a cup,
And she was drinking from it, so it may be
That she is thirsty.

(*She takes milk from the table and carries it to the door.*)

FATHER HART

That will be the child
That you would have it was no child at all.

BRIDGET

And maybe, Father, what he said was true;
For there is not another night in the year
So wicked as to-night.

MAURTEEN

Nothing can harm us
While the good Father's underneath our roof.

MARY

A little queer old woman dressed in green.

BRIDGET

The good people beg for milk and fire
Upon May Eve — woe to the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.

MAURTEEN

Hush, woman, hush!

BRIDGET

She's given milk away.
I knew she would bring evil on the house.

MAURTEEN

Who was it?

MARY

Both the tongue and face were strange.

MAURTEEN

Some strangers came last week to Clover Hill;
She must be one of them.

BRIDGET

I am afraid.

FATHER HART

The Cross will keep all evil from the house
While it hangs there.

MAURTEEN

Come, sit beside me, colleen,
And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days,
Like the good glow of the turf; and when I die
You'll be the wealthiest hereabout, for, colleen,
I have a stocking full of yellow guineas
Hidden away where nobody can find it.

BRIDGET

You are the fool of every pretty face,
And I must spare and pinch that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.

MAURTEEN

Do not be cross; she is a right good girl!
The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart.
My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change
Done well for me and for old Bridget there?
We have a hundred acres of good land,
And sit beside each other at the fire.
I have this reverend Father for my friend,
I look upon your face and my son's face —
We've put his plate by yours — and here he comes,
And brings with him the only thing we have lacked,
Abundance of good wine. (SHAWN *comes in*.) Stir up the fire,
And put new turf upon it till it blaze;
To watch the turf-smoke coiling from the fire,
And feel content and wisdom in your heart,
This is the best of life; when we are young
We long to tread a way none trod before,
But find the excellent old way through love,
And through the care of children, to the hour
For bidding Fate and Time and Change goodbye.

(MARY *takes a sod of turf from the fire and goes out through the door*. SHAWN *follows her and meets her coming in*.)

SHAWN

What is it draws you to the chill o’ the wood?
There is a light among the stems of the trees
That makes one shiver.

MARY

A little queer old man
Made me a sign to show he wanted fire
To light his pipe.

BRIDGET

You’ve given milk and fire
Upon the unluckiest night of the year and brought,
For all you know, evil upon the house.
Before you married you were idle and fine
And went about with ribbons on your head;
And now — no, Father, I will speak my mind —
She is not a fitting wife for any man — —

SHAWN

Be quiet, Mother!

MAURTEEN

You are much too cross.

MARY

What do I care if I have given this house,
Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
Into the power of faeries!

BRIDGET

You know well
How calling the good people by that name,
Or talking of them over much at all,
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MARY

Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house!
Let me have all the freedom I have lost;
Work when I will and idle when I will!
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind.
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

FATHER HART

You cannot know the meaning of your words.

MARY

Father, I am right weary of four tongues:
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,

And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

(SHAWN BRUIN *leads her to a seat at the left of the door*.)

SHAWN

Do not blame me; I often lie awake
Thinking that all things trouble your bright head.
How beautiful it is — your broad pale forehead
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair!
Sit down beside me here — these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MARY

O, you are the great door-post of this house,
And I the branch of blessed quicken wood,
And if I could I'd hang upon the post,
Till I had brought good luck into the house.

(*She would put her arms about him, but looks shyly at the priest and lets her arms fall.*)

FATHER HART

My daughter, take his hand — by love alone
God binds us to Himself and to the hearth,
That shuts us from the waste beyond His peace,
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN

Would that the world were mine to give it you,
And not its quiet hearths alone, but even
All that bewilderment of light and freedom,
If you would have it.

MARY

I would take the world
And break it into pieces in my hands
To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN

Then I would mould a world of fire and dew,
With no one bitter, grave or over wise,
And nothing marred or old to do you wrong,
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MARY

Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN

Once a fly dancing in a beam of the sun,
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament

Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold
With my warm heart for ever; the sun and moon
Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll;
But your white spirit still walk by my spirit.

(*A Voice singing in the wood.*)

MAURTEEN

There's some one singing. Why, it's but a child.
It sang, "The lonely of heart is withered away."
A strange song for a child, but she sings sweetly.
Listen, listen!

(*Goes to door.*)

MARY

O, cling close to me,
Because I have said wicked things to-night.

THE VOICE

The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away.
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;

For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
"When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung
The lonely of heart is withered away!"

MAURTEEN

Being happy, I would have all others happy,
So I will bring her in out of the cold.

(*He brings in the faery child.*)

THE CHILD

I tire of winds and waters and pale lights.

MAURTEEN

And that's no wonder, for when night has fallen
The wood's a cold and a bewildering place,
But you are welcome here.

THE CHILD

I am welcome here.
For when I tire of this warm little house
There is one here that must away, away.

MAURTEEN

O, listen to her dreamy and strange talk.
Are you not cold?

THE CHILD

I will crouch down beside you,
For I have run a long, long way this night.

BRIDGET

You have a comely shape.

MAURTEEN

Your hair is wet.

BRIDGET

I'll warm your chilly feet.

MAURTEEN

You have come indeed
A long, long way — for I have never seen
Your pretty face — and must be tired and hungry,
Here is some bread and wine.

THE CHILD

The wine is bitter.
Old mother, have you no sweet food for me?

BRIDGET

I have some honey.

(*She goes into the next room.*)

MAURTEEN

You have coaxing ways,
The mother was quite cross before you came.

(BRIDGET *returns with the honey and fills a porringer with milk*.)

BRIDGET

She is the child of gentle people; look
At her white hands and at her pretty dress.
I've brought you some new milk, but wait a while
And I will put it to the fire to warm,
For things well fitted for poor folk like us
Would never please a high-born child like you.

THE CHILD

From dawn, when you must blow the fire ablaze,
You work your fingers to the bone, old mother.
The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you must work your fingers to the bone
Because your heart is old.

BRIDGET

The young are idle.

THE CHILD

Your memories have made you wise, old father;
The young must sigh through many a dream and hope,
But you are wise because your heart is old.

(BRIDGET *gives her more bread and honey*.)

MAURTEEN

O, who would think to find so young a girl
Loving old age and wisdom?

THE CHILD

No more, mother.

MAURTEEN

What a small bite! The milk is ready now. (*Hands it to her.*) What a small sip!

THE CHILD

Put on my shoes, old mother.
Now I would like to dance now I have eaten,
The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,
And I would like to dance until the reeds
And the white waves have danced themselves asleep.

(BRIDGET *puts on the shoes, and the* CHILD *is about to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks and covers her eyes*.)

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER HART

You cannot know how naughty your words are!
That is our Blessed Lord.

THE CHILD

Hide it away!

BRIDGET

I have begun to be afraid again.

THE CHILD

Hide it away!

MAURTEEN

That would be wickedness!

BRIDGET

That would be sacrilege!

THE CHILD

The tortured thing!
Hide it away!

MAURTEEN

Her parents are to blame.

FATHER HART

That is the image of the Son of God.

THE CHILD (*caressing him*)

Hide it away, hide it away!

MAURTEEN

No, no.

FATHER HART

Because you are so young and like a bird,
That must take fright at every stir of the leaves,
I will go take it down.

THE CHILD

Hide it away!
And cover it out of sight and out of mind!

(FATHER HART *takes crucifix from wall and carries it towards inner room*.)

FATHER HART

Since you have come into this barony,
I will instruct you in our blessed faith;
And being so keen witted you'll soon learn.

(*To the others.*)

We must be tender to all budding things,
Our Maker let no thought of Calvary
Trouble the morning stars in their first song.

(*Puts crucifix in inner room.*)

THE CHILD

Here is level ground for dancing; I will dance.

(*Sings.*)

"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away."

(*She dances.*)

MARY (*to* SHAWN)

Just now when she came near I thought I heard
Other small steps beating upon the floor,
And a faint music blowing in the wind,
Invisible pipes giving her feet the tune.

SHAWN

I heard no steps but hers.

MARY

I hear them now,
The unholy powers are dancing in the house.

MAURTEEN

Come over here, and if you promise me
Not to talk wickedly of holy things
I will give you something.

THE CHILD

Bring it me, old father.

MAURTEEN

Here are some ribbons that I bought in the town
For my son's wife — but she will let me give them
To tie up that wild hair the winds have tumbled.

THE CHILD

Come, tell me, do you love me?

MAURTEEN

Yes, I love you.

THE CHILD

Ah, but you love this fireside. Do you love me?

FATHER HART

When the Almighty puts so great a share
Of His own ageless youth into a creature,
To look is but to love.

THE CHILD

But you love Him?

BRIDGET

She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD

And do you love me too?

MARY

I do not know.

THE CHILD

You love that young man there,
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame.

MARY

Queen of Angels and kind saints defend us!
Some dreadful thing will happen. A while ago

She took away the blessed quicken wood.

FATHER HART

You fear because of her unmeasured prattle;
She knows no better. Child, how old are you?

THE CHILD

When winter sleep is abroad my hair grows thin,
My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms;
I'll soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can tell
When I was born for the first time? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
That blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER HART

O she is of the faery people.

THE CHILD

One called,
I sent my messengers for milk and fire,
She called again and after that I came.

(*All except* SHAWN *and* MARY BRUIN *gather behind the priest for protection*.)

SHAWN (*rising*)

Though you have made all these obedient,
You have not charmed my sight and won from me
A wish or gift to make you powerful;
I'll turn you from the house.

FATHER HART

No, I will face her.

THE CHILD

Because you took away the crucifix
I am so mighty that there's none can pass,
Unless I will it, where my feet have danced
Or where I've whirled my finger-tops.

(SHAWN *tries to approach her and cannot*.)

MAURTEEN

Look, look!
There something stops him — look how he moves his hands
As though he rubbed them on a wall of glass!

FATHER HART

I will confront this mighty spirit alone;
Be not afraid, the Father is with us,
The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,

And He who died and rose on the third day,
And all the nine angelic hierarchies.

(*The* CHILD *kneels upon the settle beside* Mary *and puts her arms about her*.)

Cry, daughter, to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD

You shall go with me, newly-married bride,
And gaze upon a merrier multitude.
White-armed Nuala, Aengus of the Birds,
Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him
Who is the ruler of the Western Host,
Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

SHAWN

Awake out of that trance — and cover up
Your eyes and ears.

FATHER HART

She must both look and listen,
For only the soul's choice can save her now.
Come over to me, daughter; stand beside me;
Think of this house and of your duties in it.

THE CHILD

Stay and come with me, newly-married bride,
For if you hear him you grow like the rest;
Bear children, cook, and bend above the churn,
And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
Until at last, grown old and bitter of tongue,
You're crouching there and shivering at the grave.

FATHER HART

Daughter, I point you out the way to Heaven.

THE CHILD

But I can lead you, newly-married bride,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity;
For we are but obedient to the thoughts
That drift into the mind at a wink of the eye.

FATHER HART

By the dear Name of the One crucified,
I bid you, Mary Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD

I keep you in the name of your own heart.

FATHER HART

It is because I put away the crucifix
That I am nothing, and my power is nothing.
I'll bring it here again.

MAURTEEN (*clinging to him*)

No.

BRIDGET

Do not leave us.

FATHER HART

O, let me go before it is too late;
It is my sin alone that brought it all.

(*Singing outside.*)

THE CHILD

I hear them sing, "Come, newly-married bride,
Come, to the woods and waters and pale lights."

MARY

I will go with you.

FATHER HART

She is lost, alas!

THE CHILD (*standing by the door*)

But clinging mortal hope must fall from you,
For we who ride the winds, run on the waves,
And dance upon the mountains are more light
Than dewdrops on the banner of the dawn.

MARY

O, take me with you.

SHAWN

Beloved, I will keep you.
I've more than words, I have these arms to hold you,
Nor all the faery host, do what they please,
Shall ever make me loosen you from these arms.

MARY

Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD

Come, newly-married bride.

MARY

I always loved her world — and yet — and yet — —

THE CHILD

White bird, white bird, come with me, little bird.

MARY

She calls me!

THE CHILD

Come with me, little bird.

(*Distant dancing figures appear in the wood.*)

MARY

I can hear songs and dancing.

SHAWN

Stay with me.

MARY

I think that I would stay — and yet — and yet — —

THE CHILD

Come, little bird, with crest of gold.

MARY (*very softly*)

And yet — —

THE CHILD

Come, little bird with silver feet!

(MARY BRUIN *dies, and the* CHILD *goes*.)

SHAWN

She is dead!

BRIDGET

Come from that image; body and soul are gone.
You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves,
Or bole of an ash-tree changed into her image.

FATHER HART

Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey,
Almost out of the very hand of God;
And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the heart.

(*Outside there are dancing figures, and it may be a white bird, and many voices singing*:)

"The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away;
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,

Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue;
But I heard a reed of Coolaney say —
'When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung,
The lonely of heart is withered away.'"

CROSSWAYS

"The stars are threshed, and the souls are threshed from their husks."

William Blake.

To
A.E.

THE SONG OF THE HAPPY SHEPHERD

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Gray Truth is now her painted toy;
Yet still she turns her restless head:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,

Words alone are certain good.
Where are now the warring kings,
Word be-mockers? — By the Rood
Where are now the warring kings?
An idle word is now their glory,
By the stammering schoolboy said,
Reading some entangled story:
The kings of the old time are fled
The wandering earth herself may be
Only a sudden flaming word,
In clanging space a moment heard,
Troubling the endless reverie.

Then nowise worship dusty deeds,
Nor seek; for this is also sooth;
To hunger fiercely after truth,
Lest all thy toiling only breeds
New dreams, new dreams; there is no truth
Saving in thine own heart. Seek, then,
No learning from the starry men,
Who follow with the optic glass
The whirling ways of stars that pass —
Seek, then, for this is also sooth,
No word of theirs — the cold star-bane
Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
And dead is all their human truth.
Go gather by the humming-sea
Some twisted, echo-harbouring shell,
And to its lips thy story tell,

And they thy comforters will be,
Rewarding in melodious guile,
Thy fretful words a little while,
Till they shall singing fade in ruth,
And die a pearly brotherhood;
For words alone are certain good:
Sing, then, for this is also sooth.

I must be gone: there is a grave
Where daffodil and lily wave,
And I would please the hapless faun,
Buried under the sleepy ground,
With mirthful songs before the dawn.
His shouting days with mirth were crowned;
And still I dream he treads the lawn,
Walking ghostly in the dew,
Pierced by my glad singing through,
My songs of old earth's dreamy youth:
But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!
For fair are poppies on the brow:
Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.

THE SAD SHEPHERD

There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,
And he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming,
Went walking with slow steps along the gleaming
And humming sands, where windy surges wend:

And he called loudly to the stars to bend
From their pale thrones and comfort him, but they
Among themselves laugh on and sing alway:
And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend
Cried out, *Dim sea, hear my most piteous story!*
The sea swept on and cried her old cry still,
Rolling along in dreams from hill to hill;
He fled the persecution of her glory
And, in a far-off, gentle valley stopping,
Cried all his story to the dewdrops glistening,
But naught they heard, for they are always listening,
The dewdrops, for the sound of their own dropping.
And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend,
Sought once again the shore, and found a shell,
And thought, *I will my heavy story tell*
Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send
Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;
And my own tale again for me shall sing,
And my own whispering words be comforting,
And lo! my ancient burden may depart.
Then he sang softly nigh the pearly rim;
But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone
Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.

THE CLOAK, THE BOAT, AND THE SHOES

“What do you make so fair and bright?”

“I make the cloak of Sorrow:
“O, lovely to see in all men’s sight
“Shall be the cloak of Sorrow,
“In all men’s sight.”

“What do you build with sails for flight?”

“I build a boat for Sorrow,
“O, swift on the seas all day and night
“Saileth the rover Sorrow,
“All day and night.”

“What do you weave with wool so white?

“I weave the shoes of Sorrow,
“Soundless shall be the footfall light
“In all men’s ears of Sorrow,
“Sudden and light.”

ANASHUYA AND VIJAYA

A little Indian temple in the Golden Age. Around it a garden; around that the forest. ANASHUYA, *the young priestess, kneeling within the temple*.

ANASHUYA

Send peace on all the lands and flickering corn. —
O, may tranquillity walk by his elbow

When wandering in the forest, if he love
No other. — Hear, and may the indolent flocks
Be plentiful. — And if he love another,
May panthers end him. — Hear, and load our king
With wisdom hour by hour. — May we two stand,
When we are dead, beyond the setting suns,
A little from the other shades apart,
With mingling hair, and play upon one lute.

VIJAYA [*entering and throwing a lily at her*]

Hail! hail, my Anashuya.

ANASHUYA

No: be still.
I, priestess of this temple, offer up
Prayers for the land.

VIJAYA

I will wait here, Amrita.

ANASHUYA

By mighty Brahma’s ever rustling robe,
Who is Amrita? Sorrow of all sorrows!
Another fills your mind.

VIJAYA

My mother’s name.

ANASHUYA [*sings, coming out of the temple*]

A sad, sad thought went by me slowly:
Sigh, O you little stars! O, sigh and shake your blue apparel!
The sad, sad thought has gone from me now wholly:
Sing, O you little stars! O, sing and raise your rapturous carol
To mighty Brahma, he who made you many as the sands,
And laid you on the gates of evening with his quiet hands.

[*Sits down on the steps of the temple.*]

Vijaya, I have brought my evening rice;
The sun has laid his chin on the gray wood,
Weary, with all his poppies gathered round him.

VIJAYA

The hour when Kama, full of sleepy laughter,
Rises, and showers abroad his fragrant arrows,
Piercing the twilight with their murmuring barbs.

ANASHUYA

See how the sacred old flamingoes come,
Painting with shadow all the marble steps:
Aged and wise, they seek their wonted perches
Within the temple, devious walking, made
To wander by their melancholy minds.
Yon tall one eyes my supper; swiftly chase him

Far, far away. I named him after you.
He is a famous fisher; hour by hour
He ruffles with his bill the minnowed streams.
Ah! there he snaps my rice. I told you so.
Now cuff him off. He's off! A kiss for you,
Because you saved my rice. Have you no thanks?

VIJAYA [*sings*]

Sing you of her, O first few stars,
Whom Brahma, touching with his finger, praises, for you hold
The van of wandering quiet; ere you be too calm and old,
Sing, turning in your cars,
Sing, till you raise your hands and sigh, and from your car heads peer,
With all your whirling hair, and drop many an azure tear.

ANASHUYA

What know the pilots of the stars of tears?

VIJAYA

Their faces are all worn, and in their eyes
Flashes the fire of sadness, for they see
The icicles that famish all the north,
Where men lie frozen in the glimmering snow;
And in the flaming forests cower the lion
And lioness, with all their whimpering cubs;
And, ever pacing on the verge of things,
The phantom, Beauty, in a mist of tears;

While we alone have round us woven woods,
And feel the softness of each other's hand,
Amrita, while — —

ANASHUYA [*going away from him*]

Ah me, you love another,

[*Bursting into tears.*]

And may some dreadful ill befall her quick!

VIJAYA

I loved another; now I love no other.
Among the mouldering of ancient woods
You live, and on the village border she,
With her old father the blind wood-cutter;
I saw her standing in her door but now.

ANASHUYA

Vijaya, swear to love her never more,

VIJAYA

Ay, ay.

ANASHUYA

Swear by the parents of the gods,
Dread oath, who dwell on sacred Himalay,

On the far Golden Peak; enormous shapes,
Who still were old when the great sea was young
On their vast faces mystery and dreams;
Their hair along the mountains rolled and filled
From year to year by the unnumbered nests
Of aweless birds, and round their stirless feet
The joyous flocks of deer and antelope,
Who never hear the unforgiving hound.
Swear!

VIJAYA

By the parents of the gods, I swear.

ANASHUYA [*sings*]

I have forgiven, O new star!
Maybe you have not heard of us, you have come forth so newly,
You hunter of the fields afar!
Ah, you will know my loved one by his hunter's arrows truly,
Shoot on him shafts of quietness, that he may ever keep
An inner laughter, and may kiss his hands to me in sleep.

Farewell, Vijaya. Nay, no word, no word;
I, priestess of this temple, offer up
Prayers for the land.

[VIJAYA *goes*.]

O Brahma, guard in sleep
The merry lambs and the complacent kine,

The flies below the leaves, and the young mice
In the tree roots, and all the sacred flocks
Of red flamingo; and my love, Vijaya;
And may no restless fay with fidget finger
Trouble his sleeping: give him dreams of me.

THE INDIAN UPON GOD

I passed along the water's edge below the humid trees,
My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes round my knees,
My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs; and saw the moorfowl pace
All dripping on a grassy slope, and saw them cease to chase
Each other round in circles, and heard the eldest speak:
Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong or weak
Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.
The rains are from His dripping wing, the moonbeams from His eye.
I passed a little further on and heard a lotus talk:
Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk,
For I am in His image made, and all this tinkling tide
Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.
A little way within the gloom a roebuck raised his eyes
Brimful of starlight, and he said: *The Stamper of the Skies,*
He is a gentle roebuck; for how else, I pray, could He
Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing like me?
I passed a little further on and heard a peacock say:
Who made the grass and made the worms and made my feathers gay,

He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all the night
His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light.

THE INDIAN TO HIS LOVE

The island dreams under the dawn
And great boughs drop tranquillity;
The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,
A parrot sways upon a tree,
Raging at his own image in the enamelled sea.

Here we will moor our lonely ship
And wander ever with woven hands,
Murmuring softly lip to lip,
Along the grass, along the sands,
Murmuring how far away are the unquiet lands:

How we alone of mortals are
Hid under quiet bows apart,
While our love grows an Indian star,
A meteor of the burning heart,
One with the tide that gleams, the wings that gleam and dart,
The heavy boughs, the burnished dove
That moans and sighs a hundred days:
How when we die our shades will rove,
When eve has hushed the feathered ways,
With vapoury footsole among the water's drowsy blaze.

THE FALLING OF THE LEAVES

Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,
And over the mice in the barley sheaves;
Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,
And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.

The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
And weary and worn are our sad souls now;
Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,
With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

EPHEMERA

“Your eyes that once were never weary of mine
“Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
“Because our love is waning.”

And then she:
“Although our love is waning, let us stand
“By the lone border of the lake once more,
“Together in that hour of gentleness
“When the poor tired child, Passion, falls asleep:
“How far away the stars seem, and how far
“Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!”

Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,
While slowly he whose hand held hers replied:
“Passion has often worn our wandering hearts.”

The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
A rabbit old and lame limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
On the lone border of the lake once more:
Turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves
Gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
In bosom and hair.

“Ah, do not mourn,” he said,
“That we are tired, for other loves await us;
“Hate on and love through unrepining hours.
“Before us lies eternity; our souls
“Are love, and a continual farewell.”

THE MADNESS OF KING GOLL

I sat on cushioned otter skin:
My word was law from Ith to Emen,
And shook at Invar Amargin
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen.
And drove tumult and war away
From girl and boy and man and beast;
The fields grew fatter day by day,

The wild fowl of the air increased;
And every ancient Ollave said,
While he bent down his fading head,
“He drives away the Northern cold.”
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

I sat and mused and drank sweet wine;
A herdsman came from inland valleys,
Crying, the pirates drove his swine
To fill their dark-beaked hollow galleys.
I called my battle-breaking men,
And my loud brazen battle-cars
From rolling vale and rivery glen,
And under the blinking of the stars
Fell on the pirates by the deep,
And hurled them in the gulph of sleep:
These hands won many a torque of gold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

But slowly, as I shouting slew
And trampled in the bubbling mire,
In my most secret spirit grew
A whirling and a wandering fire:
I stood: keen stars above me shone,
Around me shone keen eyes of men:
I laughed aloud and hurried on
By rocky shore and rushy fen;
I laughed because birds fluttered by,
And starlight gleamed, and clouds flew high,

And rushes waved and waters rolled.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

And now I wander in the woods
When summer gluts the golden bees,
Or in autumnal solitudes
Arise the leopard-coloured trees;
Or when along the wintry strands
The cormorants shiver on their rocks;
I wander on, and wave my hands,
And sing, and shake my heavy locks.
The gray wolf knows me; by one ear
I lead along the woodland deer;
The hares run by me growing bold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

I came upon a little town,
That slumbered in the harvest moon,
And passed a-tiptoe up and down,
Murmuring, to a fitful tune,
How I have followed, night and day,
A tramping of tremendous feet,
And saw where this old tympan lay,
Deserted on a doorway seat,
And bore it to the woods with me;
Of some unhuman misery
Our married voiced wildly trolled.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

I sang how, when day's toil is done,
Orchil shakes out her long dark hair
That hides away the dying sun
And sheds faint odours through the air:
When my hand passed from wire to wire
It quenched, with sound like falling dew,
The whirling and the wandering fire;
But lift a mournful ulalu,
For the kind wires are torn and still,
And I must wander wood and hill
Through summer's heat and winter's cold.
They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.

THE STOLEN CHILD

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries,
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim gray sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams,
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping than he can understand.

TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER

Shy one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room,
Shy in the doorway
And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,
Helpful and shy.
To an isle in the water
With her would I fly.

DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree;
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

THE MEDITATION OF THE OLD FISHERMAN

You waves, though you dance by my feet like children at play,
Though you glow and you glance, though you purr and you dart;

In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves were more gay,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;
My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart
That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so fair when his oar
Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and apart,
Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

THE BALLAD OF FATHER O'HART

Good Father John O'Hart
In penal days rode out
To a shoneen who had free lands
And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands;
Sleiveens were all his race;
And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,
And they married beyond their place.

But Father John went up,
And Father John went down;
And he wore small holes in his shoes,
And he wore large holes in his gown.

All loved him, only the shoneen,
Whom the devils have by the hair,
From the wives, and the cats, and the children,
To the birds in the white of the air.

The birds, for he opened their cages
As he went up and down;
And he said with a smile, “Have peace now”;
And he went his way with a frown.

But if when any one died
Came keeners hoarser than rooks,
He bade them give over their keening;
For he was a man of books.

And these were the works of John,
When weeping score by score,
People came into Coloony;
For he’d died at ninety-four.

There was no human keening;
The birds from Knocknarea
And the world round Knocknashee
Came keening in that day.

The young birds and old birds
Came flying, heavy and sad;
Keening in from Tiraragh,
Keening from Ballinafad;

Keening from Inishmurray,
Nor stayed for bite or sup;
This way were all reproved
Who dig old customs up.

THE BALLAD OF MOLL MAGEE

Come round me, little childer;
There, don't fling stones at me
Because I mutter as I go;
But pity Moll Magee.

My man was a poor fisher
With shore lines in the say;
My work was saltin' herrings
The whole of the long day.

And sometimes from the saltin' shed,
I scarce could drag my feet
Under the blessed moonlight,
Along the pebbly street.

I'd always been but weakly,
And my baby was just born;
A neighbour minded her by day
I minded her till morn.

I lay upon my baby;
Ye little childer dear,

I looked on my cold baby
When the morn grew frosty and clear.

A weary woman sleeps so hard!
My man grew red and pale,
And gave me money, and bade me go
To my own place, Kinsale.

He drove me out and shut the door,
And gave his curse to me;
I went away in silence,
No neighbour could I see.

The windows and the doors were shut,
One star shone faint and green
The little straws were turnin' round
Across the bare boreen.

I went away in silence:
Beyond old Martin's byre
I saw a kindly neighbour
Blowin' her mornin' fire.

She drew from me my story —
My money's all used up,
And still, with pityin', scornin' eye,
She gives me bite and sup.

She says my man will surely come,
And fetch me home agin;

But always, as I’m movin’ round,
Without doors or within,

Pilin’ the wood or pilin’ the turf,
Or goin’ to the well,
I’m thinkin’ of my baby
And keenin’ to mysel’.

And sometimes I am sure she knows
When, openin’ wide His door,
God lights the stars, His candles,
And looks upon the poor.

So now, ye little childer,
Ye won’t fling stones at me;
But gather with your shinin’ looks
And pity Moll Magee.

THE BALLAD OF THE FOXHUNTER

“Now lay me in a cushioned chair
“And carry me, you four,
“With cushions here and cushions there,
“To see the world once more.

“And some one from the stables bring
“My Dermot dear and brown,
“And lead him gently in a ring,
“And gently up and down.

“Now leave the chair upon the grass:
“Bring hound and huntsman here,
“And I on this strange road will pass,
“Filled full of ancient cheer.”

His eyelids droop, his head falls low,
His old eyes cloud with dreams;
The sun upon all things that grow
Pours round in sleepy streams.

Brown Dermot treads upon the lawn,
And to the armchair goes,
And now the old man’s dreams are gone,
He smooths the long brown nose.

And now moves many a pleasant tongue
Upon his wasted hands,
For leading aged hounds and young
The huntsman near him stands.

“My huntsman, Rody, blow the horn,
“And make the hills reply.”
The huntsman loosens on the morn
A gay and wandering cry.

A fire is in the old man’s eyes,
His fingers move and sway,
And when the wandering music dies
They hear him feebly say,

“My huntsman, Rody, blow the horn,
“And make the hills reply.”
“I cannot blow upon my horn,
“I can but weep and sigh.”

The servants round his cushioned place
Are with new sorrow wrung;
And hounds are gazing on his face,
Both aged hounds and young.

One blind hound only lies apart
On the sun-smitten grass;
He holds deep commune with his heart:
The moments pass and pass;

The blind hound with a mournful din
Lifts slow his wintry head;
The servants bear the body in;
The hounds wail for the dead.

THE WANDERINGS OF USHEEN

“*Give me the world if Thou wilt, but grant me an asylum for my affections.*”

Tulka.

To
EDWIN J. ELLIS

BOOK I

S. PATRIC

You who are bent, and bald, and blind,
With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,
Have known three centuries, poets sing,
Of dalliance with a demon thing.

USHEEN

Sad to remember, sick with years,
The swift innumerable spears,
The horsemen with their floating hair,
And bowls of barley, honey, and wine,
And feet of maidens dancing in tune,
And the white body that lay by mine;
But the tale, though words be lighter than air,
Must live to be old like the wandering moon.

Caolte, and Conan, and Finn were there,
When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,
With Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,
And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill
Where passionate Maive is stony still;
And found on the dove-gray edge of the sea

A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
And like a sunset were her lips,
A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
Of many a figured embroidery;
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
That wavered like the summer streams,
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

S. PATRIC

You are still wrecked among heathen dreams.

USHEEN

“Why do you wind no horn?” she said.
“And every hero droop his head?
“The hornless deer is not more sad
“That many a peaceful moment had,
“More sleek than any granary mouse,
“In his own leafy forest house
“Among the waving fields of fern:
“The hunting of heroes should be glad.”

“O pleasant woman,” answered Finn,
“We think on Oscar’s pencilled urn,
“And on the heroes lying slain,

On Gavra’s raven-covered plain;
“But where are your noble kith and kin,
“And from what country do you ride?”

“My father and my mother are
“Aengus and Adene, my own name
“Niam, and my country far
“Beyond the tumbling of this tide.”

“What dream came with you that you came
“Through bitter tide on foam wet feet?
“Did your companion wander away
“From where the birds of Aengus wing?”

She said, with laughter tender and sweet:
“I have not yet, war-weary king,
“Been spoken of with any one;
“Yet now I choose, for these four feet
“Ran through the foam and ran to this
“That I might have your son to kiss.”

“Were there no better than my son
“That you through all that foam should run?”

“I loved no man, though kings besought
“Love, till the Danaan poets brought
“Rhyme, that rhymed to Usheen’s name,
“And now I am dizzy with the thought
“Of all that wisdom and the fame
“Of battles broken by his hands,

“Of stories builded by his words
“That are like coloured Asian birds
“At evening in their rainless lands.”

O Patric, by your brazen bell,
There was no limb of mine but fell
Into a desperate gulph of love!
“You only will I wed,” I cried,
“And I will make a thousand songs,
“And set your name all names above.
“And captives bound with leathern thongs
“Shall kneel and praise you, one by one,
“At evening in my western dun.”

“O Usheen, mount by me and ride
“To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,
“Where men have heaped no burial mounds,
“And the days pass by like a wayward tune,
“Where broken faith has never been known,
“And the blushes of first love never have flown;
“And there I will give you a hundred hounds;
“No mightier creatures bay at the moon;
“And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,
“And a hundred calves and a hundred sheep
“Whose long wool whiter than sea froth flows,
“And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,
“And oil and wine and honey and milk,
“And always never-anxious sleep;
“While a hundred youths, mighty of limb,

“But knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife,
“And a hundred maidens, merry as birds,
“Who when they dance to a fitful measure
“Have a speed like the speed of the salmon herds,
“Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,
“And you shall know the Danaan leisure:
“And Niam be with you for a wife.”
Then she sighed gently, “It grows late,
“Music and love and sleep await,
“Where I would be when the white moon climbs
“The red sun falls, and the world grows dim.”

And then I mounted and she bound me
With her triumphing arms around me,
And whispering to herself enwound me;
But when the horse had felt my weight,
He shook himself and neighed three times:
Caolte, Conan, and Finn came near,
And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,
And bid me stay, with many a tear;
But we rode out from the human lands.

In what far kingdom do you go,
Ah, Fenians, with the shield and bow?
Or are you phantoms white as snow,
Whose lips had life’s most prosperous glow?
O you, with whom in sloping valleys,
Or down the dewy forest alleys,
I chased at morn the flying deer,

With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,
And heard the foemen's bucklers rattle,
And broke the heaving ranks of battle!
And Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,
Where are you with your long rough hair?
You go not where the red deer feeds,
Nor tear the foemen from their steeds.

S. PATRIC

Boast not, nor mourn with drooping head
Companions long accurst and dead,
And hounds for centuries dust and air.

USHEEN

We galloped over the glossy sea:
I know not if days passed or hours,
And Niam sang continually
Danaan songs, and their dewy showers
Of pensive laughter, unhuman sound,
Lulled weariness, and softly round
My human sorrow her white arms wound.

We galloped; now a hornless deer
Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound
All pearly white, save one red ear;
And now a maiden rode like the wind
With an apple of gold in her tossing hand;

And a beautiful young man followed behind
With quenchless gaze and fluttering hair.

“Were these two born in the Danaan land,
“Or have they breathed the mortal air?”

“Vex them no longer,” Niam said,
And sighing bowed her gentle head,
And sighing laid the pearly tip
Of one long finger on my lip.

But now the moon like a white rose shone
In the pale west, and the sun’s rim sank,
And clouds arrayed their rank on rank
About his fading crimson ball:
The floor of Emen’s hosting hall
Was not more level than the sea,
As full of loving phantasy,
And with low murmurs we rode on,
Where many a trumpet-twisted shell
That in immortal silence sleeps
Dreaming of her own melting hues,
Her golds, her ambers, and her blues,
Pierced with soft light the shallowing deeps.

But now a wandering land breeze came
And a far sound of feathery quires;
It seemed to blow from the dying flame,
They seemed to sing in the smouldering fires.
The horse towards the music raced,

Neighing along the lifeless waste;
Like sooty fingers, many a tree
Rose ever out of the warm sea;
And they were trembling ceaselessly,
As though they all were beating time,
Upon the centre of the sun,
To that low laughing woodland rhyme.
And, now our wandering hours were done,
We cantered to the shore, and knew
The reason of the trembling trees:
Round every branch the song-birds flew,
Or clung thereon like swarming bees;
While round the shore a million stood
Like drops of frozen rainbow light,
And pondered in a soft vain mood
Upon their shadows in the tide,
And told the purple deeps their pride,
And murmured snatches of delight;
And on the shores were many boats
With bending sterns and bending bows.

And carven figures on their prows
Of bitterns, and fish-eating stoats,
And swans with their exultant throats:
And where the wood and waters meet
We tied the horse in a leafy clump,
And Niam blew three merry notes
Out of a little silver trump;
And then an answering whispering flew

Over the bare and woody land,
A whisper of impetuous feet,
And ever nearer, nearer grew;
And from the woods rushed out a band
Of men and maidens, hand in hand,
And singing, singing altogether;
Their brows were white as fragrant milk,
Their cloaks made out of yellow silk,
And trimmed with many a crimson feather:
And when they saw the cloak I wore
Was dim with mire of a mortal shore,
They fingered it and gazed on me
And laughed like murmurs of the sea;
But Niam with a swift distress
Bid them away and hold their peace;
And when they heard her voice they ran
And knelt them, every maid and man
And kissed, as they would never cease,
Her pearl-pale hand and the hem of her dress.
She bade them bring us to the hall
Where Aengus dreams, from sun to sun,
A Druid dream of the end of days
When the stars are to wane and the world be done.

They led us by long and shadowy ways
Where drops of dew in myriads fall,
And tangled creepers every hour
Blossom in some new crimson flower,
And once a sudden laughter sprang

From all their lips, and once they sang
Together, while the dark woods rang,
And made in all their distant parts,
With boom of bees in honey marts,
A rumour of delighted hearts.
And once a maiden by my side
Gave me a harp, and bid me sing,
And touch the laughing silver string;
But when I sang of human joy
A sorrow wrapped each merry face,
And, Patric! by your beard, they wept,
Until one came, a tearful boy;
“A sadder creature never stept
“Than this strange human bard,” he cried;
And caught the silver harp away,
And, weeping over the white strings, hurled
It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place
That kept dim waters from the sky;
And each one said, with a long, long sigh,
“O saddest harp in all the world,
“Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!”

And now still sad we came to where
A beautiful young man dreamed within
A house of wattles, clay, and skin;
One hand upheld his beardless chin,
And one a sceptre flashing out
Wild flames of red and gold and blue,
Like to a merry wandering rout

Of dancers leaping in the air;
And men and maidens knelt them there
And showed their eyes with teardrops dim,
And with low murmurs prayed to him,
And kissed the sceptre with red lips,
And touched it with their finger-tips.

He held that flashing sceptre up.
“Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,
“And fills with stars night’s purple cup,
“And wakes the sluggard seeds of corn,
“And stirs the young kid’s budding horn.
“And makes the infant ferns unwrap,
“And for the peewit paints his cap,
“And rolls along the unwieldy sun,
“And makes the little planets run:
“And if joy were not on the earth,
“There were an end of change and birth,
“And earth and heaven and hell would die,
“And in some gloomy barrow lie
“Folded like a frozen fly;
“Then mock at Death and Time with glances
“And wavering arms and wandering dances.

“Men’s hearts of old were drops of flame
“That from the saffron morning came,
“Or drops of silver joy that fell
“Out of the moon’s pale twisted shell;
“But now hearts cry that hearts are slaves,

“And toss and turn in narrow caves;
“But here there is nor law nor rule,
“Nor have hands held a weary tool;
“And here there is nor Change nor Death,
“But only kind and merry breath,
“For joy is God and God is joy.”
With one long glance on maid and boy
And the pale blossom of the moon,
He fell into a Druid swoon.

And in a wild and sudden dance
We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance
And swept out of the wattled hall
And came to where the dewdrops fall
Among the foamdrops of the sea,
And there we hushed the revelry;
And, gathering on our brows a frown,
Bent all our swaying bodies down,
And to the waves that glimmer by
That sloping green De Danaan sod
Sang “God is joy and joy is God.
“And things that have grown sad are wicked,
“And things that fear the dawn of the morrow
“Or the gray wandering osprey Sorrow.”

We danced to where in the winding thicket
The damask roses, bloom on bloom,
Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom,
And bending over them softly said,

Bending over them in the dance,
With a swift and friendly glance
From dewy eyes: “Upon the dead
“Fall the leaves of other roses,
“On the dead dim earth encloses:
“But never, never on our graves,
“Heaped beside the glimmering waves,
“Shall fall the leaves of damask roses.
“For neither Death nor Change comes near us,
“And all listless hours fear us,
“And we fear no dawning morrow,
“Nor the gray wandering osprey Sorrow.”

The dance wound through the windless woods;
The ever-summered solitudes;
Until the tossing arms grew still
Upon the woody central hill;
And, gathered in a panting band,
We flung on high each waving hand,
And sang unto the starry broods:
In our raised eyes there flashed a glow
Of milky brightness to and fro
As thus our song arose: “You stars,
“Across your wandering ruby cars
“Shake the loose reins: you slaves of God
“He rules you with an iron rod,
“He holds you with an iron bond,
“Each one woven to the other,
“Each one woven to his brother

“Like bubbles in a frozen pond;
“But we in a lonely land abide
“Unchainable as the dim tide,
“With hearts that know nor law nor rule,
“And hands that hold no wearisome tool
“Folded in love that fears no morrow,
“Nor the gray wandering osprey Sorrow.”

O Patric! for a hundred years
I chased upon that woody shore
The deer, the badger, and the boar.
O Patric! for a hundred years
At evening on the glimmering sands,
Beside the piled-up hunting spears,
These now outworn and withered hands
Wrestled among the island bands.
O Patric! for a hundred years
We went a-fishing in long boats
With bending sterns and bending bows,
And carven figures on their prows
Of bitterns and fish-eating stoats.
O Patric! for a hundred years
The gentle Niam was my wife;
But now two things devour my life;
The things that most of all I hate;
Fasting and prayers.

S. PATRIC

Tell on.

USHEEN

Yes, yes,
For these were ancient Usheen's fate
Loosed long ago from heaven's gate,
For his last days to lie in wait.

When one day by the tide I stood,
I found in that forgetfulness
Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
From some dead warrior's broken lance:
I turned it in my hands; the stains
Of war were on it, and I wept,
Remembering how the Fenians stept
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
Equal to good or grievous chance:
Thereon young Niam softly came
And caught my hands, but spake no word
Save only many times my name,
In murmurs, like a frighted bird.
We passed by woods, and lawns of clover,
And found the horse and bridled him,
For we knew well the old was over.
I heard one say "His eyes grow dim
"With all the ancient sorrow of men";
And wrapped in dreams rode out again
With hoofs of the pale findrinny

Over the glimmering purple sea:
Under the golden evening light.
The immortals moved among the fountains
By rivers and the woods' old night;
Some danced like shadows on the mountains,
Some wandered ever hand in hand,
Or sat in dreams on the pale strand;
Each forehead like an obscure star
Bent down above each hooked knee:
And sang, and with a dreamy gaze
Watched where the sun in a saffron blaze
Was slumbering half in the sea ways;
And, as they sang, the painted birds
Kept time with their bright wings and feet;
Like drops of honey came their words,
But fainter than a young lamb's bleat.

"An old man stirs the fire to a blaze,
"In the house of a child, of a friend, of a brother
"He has over-lingered his welcome; the days,
"Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each other;
"He hears the storm in the chimney above,
"And bends to the fire and shakes with the cold,
"While his heart still dreams of battle and love,
"And the cry of the hounds on the hills of old.

"But we are apart in the grassy places,
"Where care cannot trouble the least of our days,
"Or the softness of youth be gone from our faces,

“Or love’s first tenderness die in our gaze.
“The hare grows old as she plays in the sun
“And gazes around her with eyes of brightness;
“Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done
“She limps along in an aged whiteness;
“A storm of birds in the Asian trees
“Like tulips in the air a-winging,
“And the gentle waves of the summer seas,
“That raise their heads and wander singing.
“Must murmur at last ‘Unjust, unjust’;
“And ‘My speed is a weariness,’ falters the mouse
“And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust,
“And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house.

“But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day
“When God shall come from the sea with a sigh
“And bid the stars drop down from the sky,
“And the moon like a pale rose wither away.”

BOOK II

Now, man of croziers, shadows called our names
And then away, away, like whirling flames;
And now fled by, mist-covered, without sound,
The youth and lady and the deer and hound;
“Gaze no more on the phantoms,” Niam said,
And kissed my eyes, and, swaying her bright head

And her bright body, sang of faery and man
Before God was or my old line began;
Wars shadowy, vast, exultant; faeries of old
Who wedded men with rings of Druid gold;
And how those lovers never turn their eyes
Upon the life that fades and flickers and dies,
But love and kiss on dim shores far away
Rolled round with music of the sighing spray:
But sang no more, as when, like a brown bee
That has drunk full, she crossed the misty sea
With me in her white arms a hundred years
Before this day; for now the fall of tears
Troubled her song.

I do not know if days
Or hours passed by, yet hold the morning rays
Shone many times among the glimmering flowers
Woven into her hair, before dark towers
Rose in the darkness, and the white surf gleamed
About them; and the horse of faery screamed
And shivered, knowing the Isle of many Fears,
Nor ceased until white Niam stroked his ears
And named him by sweet names.

A foaming tide
Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and wide,
Burst from a great door marred by many a blow
From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago
When gods and giants warred. We rode between

The seaweed-covered pillars, and the green
And surging phosphorus alone gave light
On our dark pathway, till a countless flight
Of moonlit steps glimmered; and left and right
Dark statues glimmered over the pale tide
Upon dark thrones. Between the lids of one
The imaged meteors had flashed and run
And had disported in the stilly jet,
And the fixed stars had dawned and shone and set,
Since God made Time and Death and Sleep: the other
Stretched his long arm to where, a misty smother,
The stream churned, churned, and churned — his lips apart,
As though he told his never slumbering heart
Of every foamdrop on its misty way:
Tying the horse to his vast foot that lay
Half in the unvesselled sea, we climbed the stairs
And climbed so long, I thought the last steps were
Hung from the morning star; when these mild words
Fanned the delighted air like wings of birds:
“My brothers spring out of their beds at morn,
“A-murmur like young partridge: with loud horn
“They chase the noontide deer;
“And when the dew-drowned stars hang in the air
“Look to long fishing-lines, or point and pare
“An ash-wood hunting spear.

“O sigh, O fluttering sigh, be kind to me;
“Flutter along the froth lips of the sea,
“And shores, the froth lips wet:

“And stay a little while, and bid them weep:
“Ah, touch their blue-veined eyelids if they sleep,
“And shake their coverlet.

“When you have told how I weep endlessly,
“Flutter along the froth lips of the sea
“And home to me again,
“And in the shadow of my hair lie hid,
“And tell me how you came to one unbid,
“The saddest of all men.”

A maiden with soft eyes like funeral tapers,
And face that seemed wrought out of moonlit vapours,
And a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous
As any ruddy moth, looked down on us;
And she with a wave-rusted chain was tied
To two old eagles, full of ancient pride,
That with dim eyeballs stood on either side.
Few feathers were on their dishevelled wings,
For their dim minds were with the ancient things.

“I bring deliverance,” pearl-pale Niam said.

“Neither the living, nor the unlabouring dead,
“Nor the high gods who never lived, may fight
“My enemy and hope; demons for fright
“Jabber and scream about him in the night;
“For he is strong and crafty as the seas
“That sprang under the Seven Hazel Trees,
“And I must needs endure and hate and weep,

“Until the gods and demons drop asleep,
“Hearing Aed touch the mournful strings of gold.”

“Is he so dreadful?”

“Be not over bold,
“But flee while you may flee from him.”

Then I:
“This demon shall be pierced and drop and die,
“And his loose bulk be thrown in the loud tide.”

“Flee from him,” pearl-pale Niam weeping cried,
“For all men flee the demons”; but moved not
My angry, king remembering soul one jot;
There was no mightier soul of Heber’s line;
Now it is old and mouse-like: for a sign
I burst the chain: still earless, nerveless, blind,
Wrapped in the things of the unhuman mind,
In some dim memory or ancient mood
Still earless, nerveless, blind, the eagles stood.

And then we climbed the stair to a high door;
A hundred horsemen on the basalt floor
Beneath had paced content: we held our way
And stood within: clothed in a misty ray
I saw a foam-white seagull drift and float
Under the roof, and with a straining throat
Shouted, and hailed him: he hung there a star,
For no man’s cry shall ever mount so far;

Not even your God could have thrown down that hall;
Stabling His unloosed lightnings in their stall,
He had sat down and sighed with cumbered heart,
As though His hour were come.

We sought the part
That was most distant from the door; green slime
Made the way slippery, and time on time
Showed prints of sea-born scales, while down through it
The captive's journeys to and fro were writ
Like a small river, and, where feet touched, came
A momentary gleam of phosphorus flame.
Under the deepest shadows of the hall
That maiden found a ring hung on the wall,
And in the ring a torch, and with its flare
Making a world about her in the air,
Passed under a dim doorway, out of sight
And came again, holding a second light
Burning between her fingers, and in mine
Laid it and sighed: I held a sword whose shine
No centuries could dim: and a word ran
Thereon in Ogham letters, "Mananan";
That sea god's name, who in a deep content
Sprang dripping, and, with captive demons sent
Out of the seven-fold seas, built the dark hall
Rooted in foam and clouds, and cried to all
The mightier masters of a mightier race;
And at his cry there came no milk-pale face

Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,
But only exultant faces.

Niam stood
With bowed head, trembling when the white blade shone,
But she whose hours of tenderness were gone
Had neither hope nor fear. I bade them hide
Under the shadows till the tumults died
Of the loud crashing and earth shaking fight,
Lest they should look upon some dreadful sight;
And thrust the torch between the slimy flags.
A dome made out of endless carven jags,
Where shadowy face flowed into shadowy face,
Looked down on me; and in the self-same place
I waited hour by hour, and the high dome,
Windowless, pillarless, multitudinous home
Of faces, waited; and the leisured gaze
Was loaded with the memory of days
Buried and mighty. When through the great door
The dawn came in, and glimmered on the floor
With a pale light, I journeyed round the hall
And found a door deep sunken in the wall,
The least of doors; beyond on a dim plain
A little runnel made a bubbling strain,
And on the runnel's stony and bare edge
A husky demon dry as a withered sedge
Swayed, crooning to himself an unknown tongue:
In a sad revelry he sang and swung
Bacchant and mournful, passing to and fro

His hand along the runnel's side, as though
The flowers still grew there: far on the sea's waste
Shaking and waving, vapour vapour chased,
While high frail cloudlets, fed with a green light,
Like drifts of leaves, immovable and bright,
Hung in the passionate dawn. He slowly turned:
A demon's leisure: eyes, first white, now burned
Like wings of kingfishers; and he arose
Barking. We trampled up and down with blows
Of sword and brazen battle-axe, while day
Gave to high noon and noon to night gave way;
And when at withering of the sun he knew
The Druid sword of Mananan, he grew
To many shapes; I lunged at the smooth throat
Of a great eel; it changed, and I but smote
A fir-tree roaring in its leafless top;
I held a dripping corpse, with livid chop
And sunken shape, against my face and breast,
When I tore down the tree; but when the west
Surged up in plumy fire, I lunged and drave
Through heart and spine, and cast him in the wave,
Lest Niam shudder.

Full of hope and dread
Those two came carrying wine and meat and bread,
And healed my wounds with unguents out of flowers
That feed white moths by some De Danaan shrine;
Then in that hall, lit by the dim sea shine,
We lay on skins of otters, and drank wine,

Brewed by the sea-gods, from huge cups that lay
Upon the lips of sea-gods in their day;
And then on heaped-up skins of otters slept.
But when the sun once more in saffron stept,
Rolling his flagrant wheel out of the deep,
We sang the loves and angers without sleep,
And all the exultant labours of the strong:

But now the lying clerics murder song
With barren words and flatteries of the weak.
In what land do the powerless turn the beak
Of ravening Sorrow, or the hand of Wrath?
For all your croziers, they have left the path
And wander in the storms and clinging snows,
Hopeless for ever: ancient Usheen knows,
For he is weak and poor and blind, and lies
On the anvil of the world.

S. PATRIC

Be still: the skies
Are choked with thunder, lightning, and fierce wind,
For God has heard, and speaks His angry mind;
Go cast your body on the stones and pray,
For He has wrought midnight and dawn and day.

USHEEN

Saint, do you weep? I hear amid the thunder
The Fenian horses; armour torn asunder;

Laughter and cries; the armies clash and shock;
All is done now; I see the ravens flock;
Ah, cease, you mournful, laughing Fenian horn!

We feasted for three days. On the fourth morn
I found, dropping sea foam on the wide stair,
And hung with slime, and whispering in his hair,
That demon dull and unsubduable;
And once more to a day-long battle fell,
And at the sundown threw him in the surge,
To lie until the fourth morn saw emerge
His new healed shape: and for a hundred years
So warred, so feasted, with nor dreams nor fears,
Nor languor nor fatigue: and endless feast,
An endless war.

The hundred years had ceased;
I stood upon the stair: the surges bore
A beech bough to me, and my heart grew sore,
Remembering how I had stood by white-haired Finn
Under a beech at Emen and heard the thin
Outcry of bats.

And then young Niam came
Holding that horse, and sadly called my name;
I mounted, and we passed over the lone
And drifting grayness, while this monotone,
Surly and distant, mixed inseparably
Into the clangour of the wind and sea.

“I hear my soul drop down into decay,
“And Mananan’s dark tower, stone by stone,
“Gather sea slime and fall the seaward way,
“And the moon goad the waters night and day,
“That all be overthrown.

“But till the moon has taken all, I wage
“War on the mightiest men under the skies,
“And they have fallen or fled, age after age:
“Light is man’s love, and lighter is man’s rage;
“His purpose drifts and dies.”

And then lost Niam murmured, “Love, we go
“To the Island of Forgetfulness, for lo!
“The Islands of Dancing and of Victories
“Are empty of all power.”

“And which of these
“Is the Island of Content?”

“None know,” she said;
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.

BOOK III

Fled foam underneath us, and around us, a wandering and milky smoke,
High as the saddle girth, covering away from our glances the tide;

And those that fled, and that followed, from the foam-pale distance broke;
The immortal desire of immortals we saw in their faces, and sighed.

I mused on the chase with the Fenians, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair,
And never a song sang Niam, and over my finger-tips
Came now the sliding of tears and sweeping of mist-cold hair,
And now the warmth of sighs, and after the quiver of lips.

Were we days long or hours long in riding, when rolled in a grisly peace,
An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel and oak?
And we stood on a sea's edge we saw not; for whiter than new-washed fleece
Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering and milky smoke.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's edge; the sea's edge barren and gray,
Gray sand on the green of the grasses and over the dripping trees,
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would hasten away
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the moan of the seas.

But the trees grew taller and closer, immense in their wrinkling bark;
Dropping; a murmurous dropping; old silence and that one sound;
For no live creatures lived there, no weasels moved in the dark:
Long sighs arose in our spirits, beneath us bubbled the ground.

And the ears of the horse went sinking away in the hollow night,
For, as drift from a sailor slow drowning the gleams of the world and the sun,
Ceased on our hands and our faces, on hazel and oak leaf, the light,
And the stars were blotted above us, and the whole of the world was one.

Till the horse gave a whinny; for, cumbrous with stems of the hazel and oak,
A valley flowed down from his hoofs, and there in the long grass lay,
Under the starlight and shadow, a monstrous slumbering folk,
Their naked and gleaming bodies poured out and heaped in the way.

And by them were arrow and war-axe, arrow and shield and blade;
And dew-blanched horns, in whose hollow a child of three years old
Could sleep on a couch of rushes, and all inwrought and inlaid,
And more comely than man can make them with bronze and silver and gold.

And each of the huge white creatures was huger than fourscore men;
The tops of their ears were feathered, their hands were the claws of birds,
And, shaking the plumes of the grasses and the leaves of the mural glen,
The breathing came from those bodies, long-warless, grown whiter than curds.

The wood was so spacious above them, that He who had stars for His flocks
Could fondle the leaves with His fingers, nor go from His dew-cumbered skies;
So long were they sleeping, the owls had builded their nests in their locks,
Filling the fibrous dimness with long generations of eyes.

And over the limbs and the valley the slow owls wandered and came,
Now in a place of star-fire, and now in a shadow place wide;
And the chief of the huge white creatures, his knees in the soft star-flame,
Lay loose in a place of shadow: we drew the reins by his side.

Golden the nails of his bird-claws, flung loosely along the dim ground;
In one was a branch soft-shining, with bells more many than sighs,
In midst of an old man's bosom; owls ruffling and pacing around,
Sidled their bodies against him, filling the shade with their eyes.

And my gaze was thronged with the sleepers; no, not since the world began,
In realms where the handsome were many, nor in glamours by demons flung,
Have faces alive with such beauty been known to the salt eye of man,
Yet weary with passions that faded when the seven-fold seas were young.

And I gazed on the bell-branch, sleep's forebear, far sung by the Sennachies.
I saw how those slumberers, grown weary, there camping in grasses deep,
Of wars with the wide world and pacing the shores of the wandering seas,
Laid hands on the bell-branch and swayed it, and fed of unhuman sleep.

Snatching the horn of Niam, I blew a lingering note;
Came sound from those monstrous sleepers, a sound like the stirring of flies.
He, shaking the fold of his lips, and heaving the pillar of his throat,
Watched me with mournful wonder out of the wells of his eyes.

I cried, "Come out of the shadow, king of the nails of gold!
"And tell of your goodly household and the goodly works of your hands,
"That we may muse in the starlight and talk of the battles of old;
"Your questioner, Usheen, is worthy, he comes from the Fenian lands."

Half open his eyes were, and held me, dull with the smoke of their dreams;
His lips moved slowly in answer, no answer out of them came;

Then he swayed in his fingers the bell-branch, slow dropping a sound in faint streams
Softer than snow-flakes in April and piercing the marrow like flame.

Wrapt in the wave of that music, with weariness more than of earth,
The moil of my centuries filled me; and gone like a sea-covered stone
Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow and the memories of the whole of my mirth,
And a softness came from the starlight and filled me full to the bone.

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid my body as low;
And the pearl-pale Niam lay by me, her brow on the midst of my breast;
And the horse was gone in the distance, and years after years ‘gan flow;
Square leaves of the ivy moved over us, binding us down to our rest.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I forgot;
How the fetlocks drip blood in the battle, when the fallen on fallen lie rolled;
How the falconer follows the falcon in the weeds of the heron’s plot,
And the names of the demons whose hammers made armour for Conhor of old.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I forgot;
That the spear-shaft is made out of ashwood, the shield out of ozier and hide;
How the hammers spring on the anvil, on the spearhead’s burning spot;
How the slow, blue-eyed oxen of Finn low sadly at evening tide.

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driving the dust with their throngs,
Moved round me, of seamen or landsmen, all who are winter tales;

Came by me the kings of the Red Branch, with roaring of laughter and songs,
Or moved as they moved once, love-making or piercing the tempest with sails.

Came Blanid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who feastward of old time slunk,
Cook Barach, the traitor; and warward, the spittle on his beard never dry,
Dark Balor, as old as a forest, car borne, his mighty head sunk
Helpless, men lifting the lids of his weary and death-making eye.

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in loud streams,
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle of bone,
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not, with creatures of dreams,
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb as a stone.

At times our slumber was lightened. When the sun was on silver or gold;
When brushed with the wings of the owls, in the dimness they love going by;
When a glow-worm was green on a grass leaf, lured from his lair in the mould;
Half wakening, we lifted our eyelids, and gazed on the grass with a sigh.

So watched I when, man of the croziers, at the heel of a century fell,
Weak, in the midst of the meadow, from his miles in the midst of the air,
A starling like them that forgathered ‘neath a moon waking white as a shell.
When the Fenians made foray at morning with Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair.

I awoke: the strange horse without summons out of the distance ran,
Thrusting his nose to my shoulder; he knew in his bosom deep

That once more moved in my bosom the ancient sadness of man,
And that I would leave the immortals, their dimness, their dews dropping sleep.

O, had you seen beautiful Niam grow white as the waters are white,
Lord of the croziers, you even had lifted your hands and wept:
But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering alone that delight
Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs impatiently stept.

I cried, “O Niam! O white one! if only a twelve-houred day,
“I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where the old men and young
“In the Fenians’ dwellings of wattle lean on the chessboards and play,
“Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan’s slanderous tongue!

“Like me were some galley forsaken far off in Meridian isle.
“Remembering its long-oared companions, sails turning to thread-bare rags;
“No more to crawl on the seas with long oars mile after mile,
“But to be amid shooting of flies and flowering of rushes and flags.”

Their motionless eyeballs of spirits grown mild with mysterious thought
Watched her those seamless faces from the valley’s glimmering girth;
As she murmured, “O wandering Usheen, the strength of the bell-branch is naught,
“For there moves alive in your fingers the fluttering sadness of earth.

“Then go through the lands in the saddle and see what the mortals do,
“And softly come to your Niam over the tops of the tide;
“But weep for your Niam, O Usheen, weep; for if only your shoe
“Brush lightly as haymouse earth’s pebbles, you will come no more to my side.

“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your rest?”
“I saw from a distant saddle; from the earth she made her moan;
“I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn, for breast unto breast
“We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their sweetness lone.

“In the isles of the farthest seas where only the spirits come.
“Were the winds less soft than the breath of a pigeon who sleeps on her nest,
“Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound of the sea’s vague drum?
“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your rest?”

The wailing grew distant; I rode by the woods of the wrinkling bark,
Where ever is murmurous dropping, old silence and that one sound;
For no live creatures live there, no weasels move in the dark;
In a reverie forgetful of all things, over the bubbling ground.

And I rode by the plains of the sea’s edge, where all is barren and gray,
Gray sands on the green of the grasses and over the dripping trees,
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would hasten away,
Like an army of old men lounging for rest from the moan of the seas.

And the winds made the sands on the sea’s edge turning and turning go,
As my mind made the names of the Fenians. Far from the hazel and oak,
I rode away on the surges, where, high as the saddle bow,
Fled foam underneath me, and round me, a wandering and milky smoke.

Long fled the foam-flakes around me, the winds fled out of the vast,
Snatching the bird in secret; nor knew I, embosomed apart,
When they froze the cloth on my body like armour riveted fast,
For Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in the gates of my heart.

Till fattening the winds of the morning, an odour of new-mown hay
Came, and my forehead fell low, and my tears like berries fell down;
Later a sound came, half lost in the sound of a shore far away,
From the great grass-barnacle calling, and later the shore-weeds brown.

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs crushing the sand and the shells,
Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes, a chaunt of love on my lips,
Not coughing, my head on my knees, and praying, and wroth with the bells,
I would leave no saint's head on his body from Rachlin to Bera of ships.

Making way from the kindling surges, I rode on a bridle-path
Much wondering to see upon all hands, of wattles and woodwork made,
Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless the sacred cairn and the rath,
And a small and a feeble populace stooping with mattock and spade.

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining with much-toil wet;
While in this place and that place, with bodies unglorious, their chieftains stood,
Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered one, caught in your net:
Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the roaring of wind in a wood.

And because I went by them so huge and so speedy with eyes so bright,
Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old man lifted his head:
And I rode and I rode, and I cried out, "The Fenians hunt wolves in the night,
So sleep thee by daytime." A voice cried, "The Fenians a long time are dead."

A whitebeard stood hushed on the pathway, the flesh of his face as dried grass,
And in folds round his eyes and his mouth, he sad as a child without milk;
And the dreams of the islands were gone, and I knew how men sorrow and pass,
And their hound, and their horse, and their love, and their eyes that glimmer like silk.

And wrapping my face in my hair, I murmured, “In old age they ceased”;
And my tears were larger than berries, and I murmured, “Where white clouds lie spread
“On Crevroe or broad Knockfefin, with many of old they feast
“On the floors of the gods.” He cried, “No, the gods a long time are dead.”

And lonely and longing for Niam, I shivered and turned me about,
The heart in me longing to leap like a grasshopper into her heart;
I turned and rode to the westward, and followed the sea’s old shout
Till I saw where Maive lies sleeping till starlight and midnight part.

And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a sack full of sand,
They bore it with staggering and sweating, but fell with their burden at length:
Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle, I flung it five yards with my hand,
With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob for the Fenian’s old strength.

The rest you have heard of, O croziered one; how, when divided the girth,
I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a summer fly;
And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and walked on the earth,
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry.

How the men of the sand-sack showed me a church with its belfry in air;
Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in my dim eyes the crozier gleams;
What place have Caolte and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair?
Speak, you too are old with your memories, an old man surrounded with dreams.

S. PATRIC

Where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the burning stones is their place;
Where the demons whip them with wires on the burning stones of wide hell,
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and the smile on God's face,
Between them a gateway of brass, and the howl of the angels who fell.

USHEEN

Put the staff in my hands; for I go to the Fenians, O cleric, to chaunt
The war-songs that roused them of old; they will rise, making clouds with their breath
Innumerable, singing, exultant; the clay underneath them shall pant,
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled beneath them in death.

And demons afraid in their darkness; deep horror of eyes and of wings,
Afraid their ears on the earth laid, shall listen and rise up and weep;
Hearing the shaking of shields and the quiver of stretched bowstrings,
Hearing hell loud with a murmur, as shouting and mocking we sweep.

We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter the gateway of brass
And enter, and none sayeth "No" when there enters the strongly armed

guest;
Make clean as a broom cleans, and march on as oxen move over young grass;
Then feast, making converse of wars, and of old wounds, and turn to our rest.

S. PATRIC

On the flaming stones, without refuge, the limbs of the Fenians are tost;
None war on the masters of Hell, who could break up the world in their rage;
But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your soul that is lost
Through the demon love of its youth and its godless and passionate age.

USHEEN

Ah, me! to be shaken with coughing and broken with old age and pain,
Without laughter, a show unto children, alone with remembrance and fear;
All emptied of purple hours as a beggar's cloak in the rain,
As a hay-cock out on the flood, or a wolf sucked under a weir.

It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man I loved of old there;
I throw down the chain of small stones! when life in my body has ceased,
I will go to Caolte, and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast.

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

The Pronunciation of the Irish Words. — When I wrote the greater number of these poems I had hardly considered the question seriously. I copied at times somebody's perhaps fanciful phonetic spelling, and at times the ancient spelling as I found it in some literal translation, pronouncing the words always as they were spelt. I do not suppose I would have defended this system at any time, but I do not yet know what system to adopt. The modern pronunciation, which is usually followed by those who spell the words phonetically, is certainly unlike the pronunciation of the time when classical Irish literature was written, and, so far as I know, no Irish scholar who writes in English or French has made that minute examination of the way the names come into the rhythms and measures of the old poems which can alone discover the old pronunciation. A French Celtic scholar gave me the pronunciation of a few names, and told me that Mr. Whitley Stokes had written something about the subject in German, but I am ignorant of German. If I ever learn the old pronunciation, I will revise all these poems, but at present I can only affirm that I have not treated my Irish names as badly as the mediæval writers of the stories of King Arthur treated their Welsh names.

Mythological Gods and Heroes. — I refer the reader for such names as Balor and Finn and Usheen to Lady Gregory's "Cuchulain of Muirthemne" and to her "Gods and Fighting Men."

The Ballad of Father Gilligan. — A tradition among the people of Castleisland, Kerry.

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The Ballad of Father O'Hart. — This ballad is founded on the story of a certain Father O'Hart, priest of Coloony, Sligo, in the last century, as told

by the present priest of Coloony in his *History of Ballisodare and Kilvarnet*. The robbery of the lands of Father O'Hart was a kind of robbery which occurred but rarely during the penal laws. Catholics, forbidden to own landed property, evaded the law by giving a Protestant nominal possession of their estates. There are instances on record in which poor men were nominal owners of immense estates.

The Ballad of the Foxhunter. — Founded on an incident, probably itself a Tipperary tradition, in Kickham's *Knockagow*.

Bell-branch. — A legendary branch whose shaking casts all men into a sleep.

The Countess Cathleen. — I found the story of the Countess Cathleen in what professed to be a collection of Irish folk-lore in an Irish newspaper some years ago. I wrote to the compiler, asking about its source, but got no answer, but have since heard that it was translated from *Les Matinées de Timothè Trimm* a good many years ago, and has been drifting about the Irish press ever since. Léo Lespès gives it as an Irish story, and though the editor of *Folklore* has kindly advertised for information, the only Christian variant I know of is a Donegal tale, given by Mr. Larminie in his *West Irish Folk Tales and Romances*, of a woman who goes to hell for ten years to save her husband, and stays there another ten, having been granted permission to carry away as many souls as could cling to her skirt. Léo Lespès may have added a few details, but I have no doubt of the essential antiquity of what seems to me the most impressive form of one of the supreme parables of the world. The parable came to the Greeks in the sacrifice of Alcestis, but her sacrifice was less overwhelming, less apparently irremediable. Léo Lespès tells the story as follows:301 —

Ce que je vais vous dire est un récit du carême Irlandais. Le boiteux, l'aveugle, le paralytique des rues de Dublin ou de Limerick, vous le diraient mieux que moi, cher lecteur, si vous alliez le leur demander, un sixpense d'argent à la main. — Il n'est pas une jeune fille catholique à laquelle on ne l'ait appris pendant les jours de préparation à la communion sainte, pas un berger des bords de la Blackwater qui ne le puisse redire à la veillée.

Il y a bien longtemps qu'il apparut tout-à-coup dans la vielle Irlande deux marchands inconnus dont personne n'avait ouï parler, et qui parlaient néanmoins avec la plus grande perfection la langue du pays. Leurs cheveux étaient noirs et ferrés avec de l'or et leurs robes d'une grande magnificence.

Tous deux semblaient avoir le même âge; ils paraissaient être des hommes de cinquante ans, car leur barbe grisonnait un peu.

Or, à cette époque, comme aujourd'hui, l'Irlande était pauvre, car le soleil avait été rare, et des récoltes presque nulles. Les indigents ne savaient à quel sainte se vouer, et la misère devenait de plus en plus terrible.

Dans l'hôtellerie où descendirent les marchands fastueux on chercha à pénétrer leurs desseins: mais ce fut en vain, ils demeurèrent silencieux et discrets.

Et pendant qu'ils demeurèrent dans l'hôtellerie, ils ne cessèrent de compter et de recompter des sacs de pièces d'or, dont la vive clarté s'apercevait à travers les vitres du logis.

Gentlemen, leur dit l'hôtesse un jour, d'où vient que vous êtes si opulents, et que, venus pour secourir la misère publique, vous ne fassiez pas de bonnes œuvres?

— Belle hôtesse, répondit l'un d'eux, nous n'avons pas voulu aller au-devant d'infortunes honorables, dans la crainte d'être trompés par des misères fictives: que la douleur frappe à la porte, nous ouvrirons.

Le lendemain, quand on sut qu'il existait deux opulents étrangers prêts à prodiguer l'or, la foule assiégea leur logis; mais302 les figures des gens qui en sortaient étaient bien diverses. Les uns avaient la fierté dans le regard, les autres portaient la honte au front. Les deux trafiquants achetaient des âmes pour le démon. L'âme d'un vieillard valait vingt pièces d'or, pas un penny de plus; car Satan avait eu le temps d'y former hypothèque. L'âme d'une épose en valait cinquante quand elle était jolie, ou cent quand elle était laide. L'âme d'une jeune fille se payait des prix fous: les fleurs les plus belles et les plus pures sont les plus chères.

Pendant ce temps, il existait dans la ville un ange de beauté, la comtesse Ketty O'Connor. Elle était l'idole du peuple, et la providence des indigents. Dès qu'elle eut appris que des mécréants profitaient de la misère publique pour dérober des cœurs à Dieu, elle fit appeler son majordome.

— Master Patrick, lui dit elle, combien ai-je de pièces d'or dans mon coffre?

— Cent mille.

— Combien de bijoux?

— Peur autant d'argent.

— Combien de châteux, de bois et de terres?

— Pour le double de ces sommes.

— Eh bien! Patrick, vendez tout ce qui n’est pas or et apportez-m’en le montant. Je ne veux garder à moi que ce castel et le champ qui l’entoure.

Deux jours après, les ordres de la pieuse Ketty étaient exécutés et le trésor était distribué aux pauvres au fur et à mesure de leurs besoins.

Ceci ne faisait pas le compte, dit la tradition, des commis-voyageurs du malin esprit, qui ne trouvaient plus d’âmes à acheter.

Aidés par un valet infâme, ils pénétrèrent dans la retraite de la noble dame et lui dérobèrent le reste de son trésor ... en vain lutta-t-elle de toutes ses forces pour sauver le contenu de son coffre, les larrons diaboliques furent les plus forts. Si Ketty avait eu les moyens de faire un signe de croix, ajoute la légende303 Irlandaise, elle les eût mis en fuite, mais ses mains étaient captives — Le larcin fut effectué. Alors les pauvres sollicitèrent en vain près de Ketty dépouillée, elle ne pouvait plus secourir leur misère; — elle les abandonnait à la tentation. Pourtant il n’y avait plus que huit jours à passer pour que les grains et lea fourrages arrivassent en abondance des pays d’Orient. Mais, huit jours, c’était un siècle: huit jours nécessitaient une somme immense pour subvenir aux exigences de la disette, et les pauvres allaient ou expirer dans les angousses de la faim, ou, reniant les saintes maximes de l’Evangile, vendre à vil prix leur âme, le plus beau présent de la munificence du Seigneur tout-puissant.

Et Ketty n’avait plus une obole, car elle avait abandonné son châteux aux malheureux.

Elle passa douze heures dans les larmes et le deuil, arrachant ses cheveux couleur de soleil et meurtrissant son sein couleur du lis: puis elle se leva résolue, animée par un vif sentiment de désespoir.

Elle se rendit chez les marchands d’âmes.

— Que voulez-vous? dirent ils.

— Vous achetez des âmes?

— Oui, un peu malgré vous, n’est ce pas, sainte aux yeux de saphir?

— Aujourd’hui je viens vous proposer un marché, reprit elle.

— Lequel?

— J’ai une âme a vendre; mais elle est chère.

— Qu’importe si elle est précieuse? l’âme, comme le diamant, s’apprécie à sa blancheur.

— C’est la mienne, dit Ketty.

Les deux envoyés de Satan tressaillirent. Leurs griffes s’allongèrent sous leurs gants de cuir; leurs yeux gris étincelèrent — l’âme, pure, immaculée, virginale de Ketty!... c’était une acquisition inappréciable.

— Gentille dame, combien voulez-vous?

— Cent cinquante mille écus d’or.

— C’est fait, dirent les marchands: et ils tendirent à Ketty un parchemin cacheté de noir, qu’elle signa en frissonnant.

La somme lui fut comptée.

Des qu’elle fut rentrée, elle dit au majordome:

— Tenez, distribuez ceci. Avec la somme que je vous donne les pauvres attendront la huitaine nécessaire et pas une de leurs âmes ne sera livrée au démon.

Puis elle s’enferma et recommanda qu’on ne vint pas la déranger.

Trois jours se passèrent; elle n’appela pas; elle ne sortit pas.

Quand on ouvrit sa porte, on la trouva raide et froide: elle était morte de douleur.

Mais la vente de cette âme si adorable dans sa charité fut déclarée nulle par le Seigneur: car elle avait sauvé ses concitoyens de la morte éternelle.

Après la huitaine, des vaisseaux nombreux amenèrent à l’Irlande affamée d’immenses provisions de grains.

La famine n’était plus possible. Quant aux marchands, ils disparurent de leur hôtellerie, sans qu’on sût jamais ce qu’ils étaient devenus.

Toutefois, les pêcheurs de la Blackwater prétendent qu’ils sont enchainés dans une prison souterraine par ordre de Lucifer jusqu’au moment où ils pourront livrer l’âme de Ketty qui leur a échappé. Je vous dis la légende telle que je la sais.

— Mais les pauvres l’ont raconté d’âge en âge et les enfants de Cork et de Dublin chantent encore la ballade dont voici les derniers couplets: —

Pour sauver les pauvres qu’elle aime
Ketty donna

Son esprit, sa croyance même:
305Satan paya
Cette âme au dévoûment sublime,
En écus d'or,
Disons pour racheter son crime,
Confiteor.

Mais l'ange qui se fit coupable
Par charité
Au séjour d'amour ineffable
Est remonté.
Satan vaincu n'eut pas de prise
Sur ce cœur d'or;
Chantons sous la nef de l'église,
Confiteor.

N'est ce pas que ce récit, né de l'imagination des poètes catholiques de la verte Erin, est une véritable récit de carême?

The Countess Cathleen was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T.E. Wilkinson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as The Countess Kathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of

the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who306 avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences — even at the Abbey Theatre — are almost ignorant of Irish mythology — or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the proscenium and have a flight of steps at one side up which the Angel comes, crossing towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the

balcony which throw their lights into the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary. The room at Shemus Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain — a colour which becomes full of rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The two or more arches in the third scene permit the use of a gauze. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play307 when played without interval in this way lasts a little over an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows: —

(MERCHANTS *rush out*. ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on*.)

ALEEL

They're rising up — they're rising through the earth,
Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,
And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.
But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round.
Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

(*He moves about as though the air was full of spirits.* OONA *enters*.)

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled.
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA

308God guard her soul.

ALEEL

She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

(*He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The* PEASANTS *return. They carry the* COUNTESS CATHLEEN *and lay her upon the ground before* OONA *and* ALEEL. *She lies there as if dead.*)

OONA

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

(*She kisses the hands of* CATHLEEN.)

A PEASANT

We were under the tree where the path turns
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

(OONA *takes her in her arms*. A woman *begins to wail*.)

PEASANTS

Hush!

PEASANTS

Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN

309Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN

Hush!

CATHLEEN (*half rising*)

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman: judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN

And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters. Do not weep
Too great a while, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me
And bore me in your arms about the house
When I was but a child — and therefore happy,
Therefore happy even like those that dance.
The storm is in my hair and I must go.

(*She dies.*)

OONA

Bring me the looking-glass.

(A woman *brings it to her out of inner room*. OONA *holds glass over the lips of* CATHLEEN. *All is silent for a moment, then she speaks in a half-scream.*)

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN

The little plant I loved is broken in two.

(ALEEL *takes looking-glass from* OONA *and flings it upon floor, so that it is broken in many pieces*.)

ALEEL

I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more;
And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror
Are but a ball of passionate dust again!

And level earth and plumy sea, rise up!
And haughty sky, fall down!

A PEASANT WOMAN

Pull him upon his knees,
His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL

311Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.
Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye!

(*A winged* ANGEL, *carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the* R. *with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The* ANGEL *is about to pass out to the* L. *when* ALEEL *speaks. The* ANGEL *stops a moment and turns*.)

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things:
And tell of her who lies there.

(*The* ANGEL *turns again and is about to go, but is seized by* ALEEL.)

Till you speak
You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL

The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide.
And she is passing to the floor of peace,

And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

(ALEEL *releases the* ANGEL *and kneels*.)

OONA

Tell them to walk upon the floor of peace,
That I would die and go to her I love;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

312

Down by the Salley Gardens. — An extension of three lines sung to me by an old woman at Ballisodare.

Findrinny (Findruine). — A kind of white bronze.

Finvarra (Finbar). — The king of the faeries of Connaught.

Hell. — In the older Irish books Hell is always cold, and it may be because the Fomoroh, or evil powers, ruled over the north and the winter. Christianity adopted as far as possible the Pagan symbolism in Ireland as elsewhere, and Irish poets, when they spoke of "the cold flagstone of Hell," may have repeated Pagan symbolism. The folk-tales, and Keating in his description of Hell, make use, however, of the ordinary symbolism of fire.

The Lamentation of the Pensioner. — This poem is little more than a translation into verse of the very words of an old Wicklow peasant. Fret means doom or destiny.

The Land of Heart's Desire. — This little play was produced at the Avenue Theatre in the spring of 1894, with the following cast: — Maurteen Bruin, Mr. James Welch; Shawn Bruin, Mr. A.E.W. Mason; Father Hart, Mr. G.R. Foss; Bridget Bruin, Miss Charlotte Morland; Maire Bruin, Miss Winifred Fraser; A Faery Child, Miss Dorothy Paget. It ran for a little over six weeks. It was revived in America in 1901, when it was taken on tour by Mrs. Lemoyne. It has been played two or three times professionally since then in America and a great many times in England and America by amateurs. Till lately it was not part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, for I had grown to dislike it without knowing what I disliked in it. This winter, however, I have made many revisions and now it plays well enough to give me pleasure. It is printed in this book in the new form, which was acted for the first time on February313 22, 1912, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. At the Abbey Theatre, where the platform of the stage comes out in front of the curtain, the curtain falls before the priest's last words. He remains outside the curtain and the words are spoken to the audience like an epilogue.

The Meditation of the Old Fisherman. — This poem is founded upon some things a fisherman said to me when out fishing in Sligo Bay.

Northern Cold. — The Fomor, the powers of death and darkness and cold and evil, came from the north.

Nuala. — The wife of Finvarra.

Rose. — The rose is a favourite symbol with the Irish poets, and has given a name to several poems both Gaelic and English, and is used in love poems, in addresses to Ireland like Mr. Aubrey de Vere's poem telling how "The little black rose shall be red at last," and in religious poems, like the old Gaelic one which speaks of "the Rose of Friday," meaning the Rose of Austerity.

Salley. — Willow.

Seven Hazel-trees. — There was once a well overshadowed by seven sacred hazel-trees, in the midst of Ireland. A certain woman plucked their fruit, and seven rivers arose out of the well and swept her away. In my poems this well is the source of all the waters of this world, which are therefore seven-fold.

The Wanderings of Usheen. — The poem is founded upon the middle Irish dialogues of S. Patric and Usheen and a certain Gaelic poem of the last century. The events it describes, like the events in most of the poems in this volume, are supposed to have taken place rather in the indefinite period, made up of many periods, described by the folk-tales, than in any particular314 century; it therefore, like the later Fenian stories themselves, mixes much that is mediæval with much that is ancient. The Gaelic poems do not make Usheen go to more than one island, but a story in *Silva Gadelica* describes "four paradises," an island to the north, an island to the west, an island to the south, and Adam's paradise in the east.

Diarmuid and Grania

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

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Usheen
Caoelte

Conan the Bald, *one of the Fianna*
Niall, *a head servant*
Spearmen:
Fergus
Fathna
Griffan.
Grania, *the King's daughter*
Laban, *a druidess*
An Old Man
A Boy
A Young Man
A Shepherd
The Four Troops of the Fianna
Serving Men

ACT I

The banqueting hall in Tara. A table at the back of the stage on a dais. Pillars in front. There are doors to the right and left. A number of Serving Men are laying the table for the feast. Niall is directing them. There is a spinning wheel to left.

NIALL. DO not put the salmon there; put it in front of the chief man at the feast.

BOY. IS not the King the chief man at a feast?

NIALL. Not at a wedding feast; the chief man at a wedding feast is the man comes to be wed.

BOY. Where shall I put the boar's head?

NIALL. Put it where the old King used to sit, Art, King Cormac's father, Art the Melancholy they used to call him. He was deaf at the left ear, and he was always complaining that the meat was hard, and that the wind came under the door. Yes, Boy, under this roof a hundred kings have sat, right back to Ollam Fodla that made the laws. What meals they have eaten! What ale they have drunk! Before Cormac there was Art, and before Art there was Conn.

BOY. Was that Conn the Hundred Fighter?

NIALL. Yes, Conn the Hundred Fighter they used to call him and he knew a hare was put before him if the fire had been bright behind it; and he knew if the swine's flesh had been dried in the smoke of a whitehorn tree. Put the curds over there; it is not the curds but the trotters and cow-heel that used to

be put there, for that was the place of the king's fool. One day he flouted the Fianna on the high road, and they hanged him on an apple tree.

BOY. Did they hang the king's fool in time of peace?

NIALL. Fool, or wise man, war or peace, it's all one to them when their pride is up. But they are great men. Bring the dishes quickly, it is time for their messenger to be here. Put the bread there, Art's wife, Queen Maeve, used to sit there, Maeve the Half Ruddy they called her, and she liked thin barley cakes, and six men got their death because of her. [To *the Servants*]. Bring in the flagons; put them here, where Art's hound used to lie. [A *knocking at the door].* Here is the messenger of the Fianna. I knew we should not get done in time. Bring in the flagons. *[To the Servants].* Where are the drinking horns? *[More knocking. He goes to the door and opens it. Conan comes in. He is a fat rough man and is much out of breath. He is followed by three men, who carry bundles of shields on their backs].*

CONAN. Well, here are the shields. I must tell you the order they have to be hung in; and you will want to know the deeds of all these boasters, that you may tell them to the horse boys and the scullions... but no, I have seen you before. Yes, now I remember, you have been in Tara fifty years and have hung them many a time. Come, the sooner we bring the Fianna, the sooner we shall eat. *[He turns to go out, coming back].* Well, there is good food on this table and all for the marriage of Finn and Grania. This boar was a fine beast, they fatten well on the acorns of Tara, and you have good big salmon in your river. Many a time I have had nothing but badger's flesh and otter's flesh when I have been in the woods with the Fianna, and the war about us. Give me a horn of ale. *[He is given a horn of ale but the horn is not a big one and he flings it away in disgust. He is given a larger one].* Ah,

you have a good life of it here, but I am tired running the messages of the Fianna. Have
I not legs to grow weary, and a body to sweat like another? I am hungry too, but I dare not put a knife in the meat till the Fianna are here.

NIALL. You are one of the Fianna and have just left them. You will be able to tell us when they will be here.

CONAN. I left them at the foot of the hill. A shepherd's wife followed Diarmuid and Diarmuid laughed at her. Goll took her part and
Finn took Diarmuid's part for Finn and Diarmuid always stand together. Well, come, let us go hurry them. I will tell them about the boar's head and the salmon. Yes, you have fine salmon in Tara.
[They go out].

BOY. The Fianna have a rough messenger.

NIALL. I would have none say that I have said it, but he is a man of little account among them.

BOY. Men wear sheep-skins in my country, but I had thought that the Fianna wore fine clothes.

NIALL. I will tell you why the Fianna made him wear it one of these days, and why Finn made him one of the Fianna. Would you be one of them?

BOY. Yes, if I might be Finn, or Diarmuid, or Caoelte.

NIALL. They are famous for their battles; they are great men, but would you not be Conan the Bald if you could?

BOY. That man with the sheep skin?

NIALL. Well, he eats when he is hungry, and sleeps when he is sleepy and rails at whomever displeases him. Those great men have the best seats at the table, and the fairest women for their bed-fellows, and yet I would not... *[He rushes across the stage to keep one of the men from hanging Goll's shield at the lower end of the table.]*
Would you put Goll son of Morna's shield below Alvin's and Fergus's; would you have the roof tree burnt over our heads? It is the third shield from Finn's. Let me see now, let me think, it was Cool Finn's father who made this custom of the hanging up of every man's shield above his place. No quarreling, everything settled. I was going to tell you who made the Fianna, Boy; it was Cool. He took a thousand men out of every kingdom, and made them into an army, and set them to watch the shores. No one is old enough except myself to remember those times. The men of Lochland and the men of Mona, and the men of Alba carrying off women here and sheep there, and leaving smoke and fire behind them, and nobody to meet them but men taken from the sheep-fold, and from the plough and from the smithy. Yes, that is where Caoelte's shield hangs. I told you its place last time and you remembered it. *[Returning to the Boy].* But I was telling you how the Fianna saved the women and sheep. They fight well, but they are proud. Ah, they are very proud. I was telling you Boy, how they hanged the king's fool, and many and many a time they have made war on the king himself. Finn's father, Cool, died fighting against Cormac's father, Art the Melancholy, and it was for that death Finn kept out of the battle Cormac fought against the men of Mona. It has been this way always, and sometimes Eri has been like a shaking sod between them; but this marriage mends all.
[Enter Grania and Laban].

BOY. There is old Laban and the King's daughter.

NIALL. Quick, quick put up the rest of the shields — Come away.

BOY. I have heard that there are women who live seven hundred years in the woods, spinning the threads of the long lived people of the woods, and then seven hundred years spinning for men. She is one of them. She has come back after these many years an old witch; they say she has more shapes than one.
[Niall and the Boy go out, and are followed by other serving men].

GRANIA. You cannot persuade me. I will not marry Finn.

LABAN. Hush! Hush!

GRANIA. But the Fianna are coming too; you will tell me about them, about the young men. Yes, their shields are here already.

LABAN. Conan has brought them.

GRANIA. YOU have promised to tell me about the Fianna. If you will not, Niall will.

LABAN. YOU have been in the woods with Niall lately, and he has shown you where bees make their nests, and you have come home with honeycomb and flowers.

GRANIA. But it was you who taught me the magic there is in the herbs. You took me to a place where Earth breathes out of a cave.

LABAN. I am too old to go far now.

GRANIA. Mother, there are some that say you will never be older than you are. And now we will go over to the shields, because you will not refuse me anything I ask. Niall would not refuse me anything.

LABAN. DO not call him. Let nobody know what is in your mind.

GRANIA. *[Going to the table].* My father sits here, Finn son of Cool sits next to him, and here is my place next to Finn... but it will be empty.

LABAN. Hush! no man matters to you now but Finn.

GRANIA. YOU told me his hair was grey. Grey hair and brown hair were the same to me a month ago. A month ago I was in the woods...

LABAN. It was spring time when the young find many things among the woods.

GRANIA. I had climbed a little path, and stood on the hill, where the trees grow sparer, looking into the mist.

LABAN. And it was then that you thought about a young man.

GRANIA. The mist was hanging on the brow of the hill, and something seemed to be moving over the world and to come out of the mist. It was beautiful, mother. The world was singing and the singing came into my breasts. But come to the shields and tell me of the men who are to sit under them.

LABAN. I dare not, I dare not.

GRANIA. But you said that to-night would not be my marriage night.

LABAN. NO, no child I never said such a thing. Hush, lest they should hear you.

GRANIA. They who are wiser than you said it, Mother. The thread that you spun yesterday, the stars that we watched last night, the pebbles that we threw into the well this morning.

LABAN. Hush, your father will be here; there is no time now. I saw you talking to King Cormac this morning, why did you not tell him of this change?

GRANIA. I took his hands in mine, and thought to tell him.

LABAN. YOU should have told him.

GRANIA. But he would have sent a messenger, and I should not have seen the Fianna together.

LABAN. So that you might pick a man who would carry you away. It will be long before men come to the end of this mischief. The Fianna shall be broken in two because of it. Oh, why did Cormac shut his ears to what I told him? There will be flights and battles, ruin on ruin, and neither you nor I can do anything.

GRANIA. I would not be a trouble if I could help it. I would not set Finn against any man. I would have Finn and my man friends. I would stand between them. I would hand them their ale. Whose shield is that, mother? That one with the red otter painted upon it.

LABAN. That shield with the red otter is the shield of Fergus. He is taller than all the others, his hair and his beard are brown, and he wears a crimson

cloak over a white tunic.

GRANIA. Is he strong and stately? Would he make my heart beat?

LABAN. He is strong and stately, but there is grey in his beard. That red shield with the white deer's head painted upon it is the shield of Usheen. He has yellow hair, and he has long white hands, with fingers hard at the tips from plucking of harp strings, and they say that no woman has refused him her love.

GRANIA. IS he young?

LABAN. There are younger than he. That grey shield with the raven painted upon it, is the shield of Goll, the son of Morna. He is a great hunter, and his arms and legs are as strong as the posts of a door.

GRANIA. IS there mirth in his eyes?

LABAN. He has the quiet of the woods in his eyes. But I see your mind is not set upon one that is strong, but one that is young. That white shield with the green fish is the shield of Caoelte. They call him Caoelte the Swift-Footed, and he is young and a teller of battle tales. But that silver shield with the flying white heron upon it is the shield of Diarmuid. He is the youngest and comeliest of all. He has brown hair and blue eyes, and light limbs, and his skin is white but for freckles. He is courteous and he is merry with women. It is said of him that he will not be remembered for deeds of arms but as a true lover, and that he will die young.

GRANIA. Diarmuid, Diarmuid, a pleasant sounding name... Diarmuid a sweet sounding name.

LABAN. But, child, how think you that these things will come about?

GRANIA. I believe in your soothsaying, Mother, that a man as young as I am will come and carry me away.

LABAN. NO, no, Diarmuid will not break his oath to Finn. Diarmuid has saved Finn's life three times and Finn has saved Diarmuid's life once. They always stand together.

GRANIA. YOU said his hair was brown, and his eyes blue, and his limbs light, and his skin white but for freckles. It was for such a man that I looked into the mist. But thinking of love makes the brain giddy.

LABAN. What can he do? He cannot overthrow Finn and his army.

GRANIA. *[Waking from a reverie].* You must find a way, Mother, it is for you to find a way.

LABAN. They would hang me from the rafters, child, they would hang me.

GRANIA. YOU would baffle them: it would not be difficult for you. But how shall I escape from Finn's marriage bed? Shall I run into the woods?

LABAN. The woods are full of wolves.

GRANIA. I do not fear the wolves.

LABAN. They would follow you. You could not escape them. They would tear you to pieces.

GRANIA. If you would not have me go into the woods, find a way of escape.

LABAN. Why will you not marry Finn? You would be the greatest woman in Eri.

GRANIA. I will not marry Finn; and you, Mother, who has taken care of me since you could carry me in your arms, you would not have me run alone into the woods.

LABAN. The woods are lonely, Grania, you must not go. Hush! *[Taking her aside].* Child, love has made you wise as the bird in the wood that seeks a mate. There is a way, listen! The greatest among the Fianna sit at table with Cormac and Finn; and Niall and another serving man will wait upon them... But do you say that you will pour out their ale for them, and let them not deny you this. You must say that there could be no denying you anything on your marriage night. Then come to me and I will find a way. Then I will bewitch the ale, and I will put a pale dust into it, and will make a spell over it. *[Enter Cormac with two Councillors].* Hush, here is your father. *[Laban sits down and begins to spin].*

CORMAC. This is the wisest marriage, though I might have made a greater one. I might have married her to the King of Alba, but this marriage will keep our kingdom safe. *[He turns and sees Grania].*
My dear daughter, I have been looking for you. Let us sit together and talk to one another. To-night you go away from me, but you go with the chief man in Eri. *[The Councillors withdraw].* Come, dear daughter, let us sit together. Why do you stand with fixed eyes, and I see you have not an ornament upon you.

GRANIA. I have forgotten them.

CORMAC. I should have wished to have seen you in your bracelets and your clasp with the emeralds. Will you wear them?

GRANIA. I can send for them and wear them for you, but I am not minded to wear them.

CORMAC. Why are you not minded to wear them? *[Pause].* What has Laban told you? She was telling you something when I came in.

GRANIA. Father you have often seen me wear my bracelets, and my clasp, and can love me without them, as can any other man. Father, listen, let us sit together, or let us talk as we walk hither and thither. I am going from this house where my mother lived and where I have always lived, with one you call the chief man in Eri, but whom
I have never seen, so I have been questioning her spindle, and you know all that she finds in her spindle is true.

CORMAC. And she has told you?

GRANIA. Only that I am going away into the woods.

CORMAC. You are troubled, my daughter, a woman is always troubled when her marriage is at hand. Maybe you think Finn too rough a man to marry — I might have married you to the King of Alba who is a man of peace: he sent messengers, but Finn is more worthy to be your husband.

GRANIA. I have not seen Finn.

CORMAC. The enemies of Eri have seen him; you know how he has held its borders against them. Finn and his Fianna have made Eri great, as when the Red Branch was at Emain Macha.

GRANIA. YOU wish me to marry as kings and queens marry, but I...

CORMAC. [*Suspiciously*]. You have set your heart upon some boy.

GRANIA. The Fianna are coming. I shall wed this night him who is the chief man among them in my eyes.

CORMAC. That is well, Finn is the chief man of Eri after the high king.
[A sound of trumpets outside. The Councillors of Cormac and the servants enter. The servants open the door. Niall stands by the door].

NIALL. Way for Finn and his Council.
[Enter Finn, Usheen, Caoelte, Diarmuid etc.].

CORMAC. Finn is welcome to my house.

FINN. AS the marriage law is, I declare the bride price upon the threshold. I give my word to guard this kingdom against all cattle spoilers, that are of the kingdom of Eri, and to guard it before my own country from the men of Lochland and the men of Mona; and I give my word to overthrow all kings of Eri that raise their hand against the high king. I cannot give a king's gift for the Fianna have neither sheep nor cattle, nor towns nor villages, nor great store of silver and gold.

CORMAC. The bride price is worthy of Finn and of my daughter.

[Cormac takes Finn across the stage and presents him to Grania].

DIARMUID. *[At the door].* And this is Grania.

USHEEN. Do not look at her, Diarmuid, king's daughters are not for us.

NIALL. *[In a loud voice].* Let the hot meats be brought in, way for the heads of the four troops of the Fianna...

[Enter a number of men, they stand about the door, Cormac leaves Finn and Grania and goes towards the door to welcome the Fianna].

GRANIA. There is a scar upon your cheek. That is the scar made by the sword of Forgael, when you overthrew the men of Aidne.

FINN. Has the tale of that battle come so far?

GRANIA. I have listened all my life to tales of your battles. *[Taking his hand in both her hands].* This hand has overthrown many kings.

FINN. Grania must not praise me if she would not take my luck away.

GRANIA. Some day you will tell me about your battles.
[She turns away as if already weary of him].

FINN. Are my battles more to you than my love?
[Cormac brings Caoelte, Usheen and Diarmuid towards Grania — Cormac and Finn go up the stage].

GRANIA. Ah, this is Usheen, I knew him by his harp of red yew. Will you sing us love songs to-night?

CAOELTE. I am Caoelte, and this is Diarmuid.

GRANIA. Welcome Caoelte, teller of battle tales. There is a tale you tell...
[She stands looking at Diarmuid, forgetful of everything].
And this is Diarmuid. Has Diarmuid nothing to say to me?

DIARMUID. What should I say to you? I see you on your wedding night, Grania.

GRANIA. The wedding feast is spread and I shall be wedded and bedded before dawn if someone does not carry me away.

DIARMUID. If someone does not carry you away!

GRANIA. I know your shield Diarmuid. It has a flying white heron upon it, and this is your sword.
[He gives her his sword and they stand looking at each other].

USHEEN. Diarmuid!

[Grania gives back Diarmuid's sword].

NIALL. The King and Finn son of Cool are seated, the guests at this table are Usheen, Caoelte, Goll son of Morna, Diarmuid, Fergus, Fathna. The tables for the rest of the Fianna are spread beyond the arras of the western hall.
[The Fianna and serving men withdraw leaving Niall and one serving man to wait at the king's table].

CORMAC. My daughter, why do you not take your place beside Finn son of Cool?

GRANIA. Every night, father, I have poured out your ale, I would do so this the last time, and this night pour out my husband's for the first time.

CORMAC. Grania must not pour out our ale.

FINN. But if this be her wish?

GRANIA. It is the first favour I have asked.

FINN. All here will remember this as an honour.

[The King signs to the serving men to withdraw, Grania returns to Laban].

GRANIA. Has this been done well? Give me the ale.

LABAN. Here are two flagons that I have made sleepy... but no,
I will make a spell over them.
Do all that I bid you
Pour sleep in the ale horns
That all that have drunk them
May sleep as on pillows
Till cock crow at morning.
Give them this ale and they will sleep till cockcrow. Give it to all but Caoelte and Usheen and Diarmuid.

[Laban goes out. Grania passes along the table filling the cups and horns. Caoelte and Usheen are the last who should be served. When she comes to Diarmuid she stands looking at him].

CORMAC. Why do you not fill Diarmuid's cup?
[Grania drops the flagon],

GRANIA. The ale is all spilled; I will bring another flagon.

CORMAC. Daughter, I do not like the spilling of ale at a marriage feast.

CONAN. It never happens but it brings ill luck.

DIARMUID. Conan sees ill luck everywhere. When will Finn take away his favour from Conan, and let the Fianna give him his deserts?

FINN. Tell us a story Caoelte, and put the spilling of the ale out of our minds.
[Caoelte rises from his place, and takes his harp. He stands touching his harp as if uncertain what story he is going to tell]. Tell us the story of the house of the quicken trees.

CAOELTE. Yes, I will tell you the story of the house of the quicken trees. [A *pause].* It is gone, it went out of my mind of a sudden. A new story is coming to me... it is coming to me... I see a man lying dead and his wife going away with another.

FINN. What quarrel have you with me, Caoelte, that you tell such a story at my marriage?

CAOELTE. There is fear on me, Finn, for I saw beyond the world suddenly and clearly.

USHEEN. Let us hear the story of the quicken trees. Tell it to us, Caoelte. Or shall we ask Goll to tell it to us? *[He tries to rouse Goll],* Goll is sleepy.

CONAN. You have no need to tell your stories to make men sleepy.
The names of them are enough.

FINN. Let us drink and forget our thoughts of ill luck.

CONAN. The Fianna have had their share of good luck. To-day the ale has been spilt, and a strange tale put into Caoelte's mind.

DIARMUID. I am weary of Conan's bitter tongue, Finn. I would beat him from the table.

FINN. It would be worst of all for blows to be struck at my marriage feast. Conan and Diarmuid, I will have peace.

CORMAC. *[Trying to rouse himself].* Let Conan tell his story or let Usheen tell us a story; I am growing sleepy.

USHEEN. I cannot remember any story — I too have had my thoughts taken away.

CONAN. Diarmuid, Caoelte, and Usheen have forgotten their boasting stories, but Conan has many a pleasant story and no one asks him for one. I will tell a pleasant story. I will tell of the death of Diarmuid.

FINN. I will have no tale of death at my marriage feast. To speak of Diarmuid's death may be to bring death upon him. Be silent or you may take his luck away.

GRANIA. *[Coming nearer to the table].* Will Diarmuid die by sword or will he be made captive?

FINN. I forbid this story.

DIARMUID. The story of my death is an old story, and it no longer makes me afeared. Tell on.

CONAN. *[Obsequiously. Coming from the table].* Oh, my beautiful Grania, this is the way it was. Diarmuid was put out to foster with a shepherd, and no one was so beautiful as Diarmuid when he was a child, except the shepherd's son. The shepherd's son was much more beautiful than Diarmuid and his beauty made Diarmuid's father jealous and one day he crushed the shepherd's son to death between his knees.

GRANIA. Tell me of Diarmuid, tell me of Diarmuid.

CONAN. The shepherd wept and wept. Oh, how he wept. And after a while he took his second son into the woods, and made a spell over him with a Druid hazel stick, and changed him into a black and bristleless boar. And some day that boar is to break out of the woods and to kill many men and many women. All the Fianna are to gather for the hunting of him; they are to hunt him round Eri and through Eri and from kingdom to kingdom. Oh what a hunting, oh, what a hunting!

GRANIA. Tell me more of Diarmuid. Tell me quickly.

CONAN. I must drink again, I am thirsty again. *[He drinks*]. Diarmuid must go out against that boar and must be killed. It was to kill him that the shepherd made the spell over his second son. He shall be torn by the tusks, and his face shall be foul, because it will be bloody. I would that the women of Eri could see him when he is foul and bloody. *[He staggers],* I am growing sleepy, because I have to run the messages of the Fianna... *[He recovers himself],* I shall live to see him when the tusks have torn him, for it has been foretold of him also that he shall not live long. He shall not be remembered for the deeds of arms but as a lover of women. He shall live as a lover of women, and his life will soon be over. Who has put witchcraft in my ale? Who among the Fianna has done this?

[He falls],

USHEEN. He said there was witchcraft in the ale, and look, they are all sleeping. Who was it that put witchcraft into the ale, Grania?

GRANIA. Laban, the Druidess has done this for me. I had never a mind to marry Finn. But why does not Diarmuid come to us? *[Diarmuid comes from the table].* It was for you that I ordered witchcraft to be put into the ale.

DIARMUID. For me, Grania?

GRANIA. I had never a mind to marry Finn. I am going away with you to-night, we shall be far away before they awake.

DIARMUID. You and I, and you did not see me before this night!

GRANIA. I desired you and you were in my thoughts before I saw you, Diarmuid. You were in my thoughts, Diarmuid.
[She takes him in her arms.]

DIARMUID. I too desired you and you were in my thoughts — oh beautiful woman! You were in my thoughts, Grania. Let me look at you. Let me put back your hair. Your eyes are grey, Grania, your eyes are grey and your hands... But Finn, but Finn... Grania wife of Finn, why have you played with me?

GRANIA. I am not the wife of Finn *[She goes towards Diarmuid].*
And now I cannot be Finn's wife for you have held me in your arms and you have kissed me.

DIARMUID. What is this madness, Grania? Here, here this night and Finn sleeping there.

GRANIA. If he had loved me, his love would have been stronger than witchcraft. *[A pause].* But why do you go away? Is not my hair soft, are not my cheeks red, is not my body shapely? You held my hair in your hands but now, and your lips were on my cheek and lips. Were not my lips soft? You see that he shrinks from me. It may be that no man will take me because he wants me, but only because I am a king's daughter. Would you shrink from me,
Caoelte, if it were you I had asked to go away with me. Would you, Usheen?

CAOELTE. Look, Grania, at the sleeping man whose ale you have bewitched.

USHEEN. If Finn were to wake, he would take some terrible vengeance for this.

GRANIA. What is his vengeance to me now? I will go into the woods and will wander alone there till I die.

FINN. *[In his sleep],* Diarmuid! Diarmuid!

DIARMUID. When I looked into your eyes, Grania, it was as though I had come out of a cave into the dawn. But I cannot, I cannot, we have sworn an oath to Finn. We swore it upon the rock where the earth screamed under Con son of Filmy. If the oath were broken the earth would send famine, the corn would wither, the Fianna would be divided, an enemy would come.

USHEEN. Take down your shield and begone from her Diarmuid.

GRANIA. He looks at me because it has been foretold.

DIARMUID. *[Disengaging himself from Usheen and Caoelte].* What has been foretold? Who has foretold it?

USHEEN. *[Putting his hand on Diarmuid's shoulder].* Diarmuid!

CAOELTE. You will be the first of the Fianna to break his oath.

DIARMUID. The fortune teller has lied, if she has said that I will break my oath to Finn. What did she tell you? What has she said?
Has she said this?

GRANIA. She spoke of a woman pledged to marry a man whom she did not love, and of a man who would come and take her away from that marriage bed. She foretold that the man would leave all things and that the woman would leave all things for love's sake. She foretold that they would go away in the middle of the marriage feast, and wander in the unpeopled woods, and be happy by the rushy margin of many streams.

DIARMUID. And the man is I, and the woman is you.

GRANIA. She foretold that it shall seem as if all men had forgotten them, but the wild creatures shall not fly from them. They shall be happy under green boughs and become wise in all woodland wisdom, and as she spoke I too seemed to see them wandering on paths untrodden by the feet of the deer, where there are sudden odours of wild honey, and where they will often throw their arms about one another and kiss one another on the mouth. *[She goes nearer to him].* And she told me, Diarmuid, that we should make our beds with the skins of deer under cromlechs and in caves, and awake from sleep we know not why, as though the dwarfs in the rocks

had called to us, that we might see the starlight falling through the leaves. She told me the dwarfs of the rocks and the secret people of the trees should watch over us, and though all the men of Eri were our enemies they should not pluck us out of one another's arms.

DIARMUID. I must not listen or I will take her in my arms. I will awake Finn — Finn, Finn awake!

GRANIA. What would you tell him?

DIARMUID. That the world vanishes, that I see nothing but you.

GRANIA. Is it not said that Diarmuid never refused help to a woman, and who is more helpless than I?

DIARMUID. Had you not told me that you loved me, I would have helped you.

GRANIA. Help me, Diarmuid.

DIARMUID. Caoelte and Usheen have seen my trouble; they will tell Finn of my trouble. She has asked me for help and I must give it.

GRANIA. *[Standing at the door which she has thrown open].* Come, Diarmuid, to the woods, the birds of Aonghus, the birds of love, the birds that the eye cannot see, sing joyously, sing fiercely, they clap their wings and sing.

DIARMUID. She asks for my help and I must give it.

USHEEN. From this night the Fianna are broken in two.

CAOELTE. And the kingdom that was to be made safe is in danger, and Diarmuid's oath is broken.

DIARMUID. My oath is not broken, tell Finn that. Tell him that this sword shall guard her by day, and will lie between us at night. Tell him I will send some messenger, some token that shall say to him — Finn, I bring you word that so many hours or so many moons have passed by and that Diarmuid's oath is unbroken.

GRANIA. The woods are sad with their summer sadness, and the birds of love have become silent, but they are not sleeping, their eyes are bright among the boughs...
[She goes out].

DIARMUID. I must follow her. Upon whose face shall I after this look in friendship again?
[He takes his shield from the wall and goes out].

USHEEN. [Goes *to the door and looks after them].* They have gone westward to the woods.

CAOELTE. When Finn wakes, we must tell him that they have gone eastward towards the sea.

ACT II.

Diarmuid's house. A spinning wheel to left. Walls made of roughly hewed timber. Laban sitting before the spinning wheel. Cormac sitting near her. The twilight is slowly deepening. Enter Diarmuid and a shepherd carrying fleeces.

DIARMUID. We have not yet finished our shearing. There are a few more sheep and we shall be done.
[Diarmuid and shepherd go out].

CORMAC. Every kind of sorrow has come upon this land: the Fianna are divided, and the galleys of our enemies are drawn up upon the shore. Our kingdom will be over-run by the Lochlanders and the hunting of Diarmuid and Grania will begin again.

LABAN. Have your long talks with Diarmuid come to no better end than that?

CORMAC. I talked with Diarmuid late into the night and I could not persuade him. Old woman who has spoken nothing but lies, I told him that the kingdom I had given him would be taken from him, and that I could not save him from Finn, or Eri from the invader.

LABAN. I heard your voices, but I did not hear Grania's voice.

CORMAC. He said "Tell Finn to begone from my valley, let the sod be blown into flame again and the pursuit of Diarmuid and Grania begin again."

LABAN. And Grania stood by the door post watching the moon shining down the valley, looking to where Diarmuid's cattle were feeding and towards the encampment of Finn.

CORMAC. Yes, she stood there saying nothing. I turned to her often, saying, "If I take this message to Finn, you will have to fly into the woods again."

LABAN. And she answered nothing?

CORMAC. Only this: "Where will Laban go if we are driven from this valley?" She said, "Father, you brought her here to be near me and if we are driven into the woods you will see that no harm comes to her." But remember how near the Fianna were to hanging you from a rafter that night at Tara, and if I bring Diarmuid's message to Finn I may not know how to save you from them.

LABAN. They did not dare. The rope fell out of Goll's hand; and Conan told them they could not hang me but with a rope that I had spun, and they tried to make me spin one.

CORMAC. Yes, yes, but Finn has waited for three days. [*Going to the door].* This sunset ends the third day. The horses are waiting and Niall is at their heads. Speak if you have found any meaning in the thread.

LABAN. The thread keeps breaking as it runs from the distaff.

CORMAC. Then the end of somebody is near; the end of Diarmuid or of Grania or of Finn... or the end of Eri. You must tell me before I go for I cannot wait any longer.

LABAN. The thread is breaking; I cannot find a whole thread in the flax.

CORMAC. You have lied to me, old woman. You brought me this long way that you might be near Grania. *[She gets up from the wheel, Cormac puts her back again].* But spin since there is flax in the distaff, the earth knows all things and the flax comes out of the earth.

LABAN. What would you know? If there be forgiveness in Finn's heart?

CORMAC. The men of Lochland have dragged up 70 galleys on to the beach of Rury.

LABAN. You are troubled, being afraid that Caoelte and Usheen may not fight against the men of Lochland because they are angry with
Finn. You are afraid that Finn may begin the hunting of Diarmuid and Grania again? You are afraid that Diarmuid and Grania...

CORMAC. Old woman full of wisdom about everything but the danger that waits us, I have to carry Diarmuid's answer to Finn and I would know what will happen to Diarmuid and to my daughter.
You sit silent. Will you answer me?
[A long pause, the King walks up the stage slowly and when he turns Laban rises from the wheel],

LABAN. I see Diarmuid standing by Finn with his hand on Finn's shoulder.

CORMAC. Then they are friends.

LABAN. I see Diarmuid drawing his sword.

CORMAC. Against whom, Laban? And then....

LABAN. I can see Finn drawing his dagger.

CORMAC. His dagger — his sword — look again.

LABAN. It is a dagger that I see.

CORMAC. NOW wind the thread tightly round the forefinger. Now hold the thread tightly and look, for the earth knows all and her knowledge is in the flax.

LABAN. The vision has passed from me, I see nothing else.

CORMAC. Spin again, spin another thread.

LABAN. I cannot see more than once, and the thread is broken again, you have broken it.

CORMAC. Then is ill luck in my hands. If the thread had not broken we should know all. You say you saw Finn pull out his dagger, but was not Diarmuid standing by his side with his hand on Finn's shoulder? What is the meaning of this? If you do not tell me I will have you beaten and your wheel thrown into the lake.
[Enter Grania].

GRANIA. Ah, my father, she can tell you nothing if you speak so loud.

CORMAC. She has told me strange things, things without meaning.

GRANIA. YOU never believe her words, father, when she speaks them, but afterwards you find out that she had spoken truly.

CORMAC. True or false it matters not since they do not help me.
Where is Diarmuid? Does he speak to-day as he spoke last night?

GRANIA. He has said nothing to me. But a day and night have gone since you have spoken to him. His mind may have changed. *[Going up the stage].* This is the hour when the flock comes home. Diarmuid is thinking of the folding of his sheep. You will find him with the shepherd. Or shall I send Laban to bring him? *[Laban gets up and goes out].* The fold is not far from the house. It was brought nearer for the wolves carried off three of our sheep last week... Ah, I see him coming up the path, Laban is going to meet him. *[Grania comes down the stage to Cormac].* But, dear father, three days are not a long while to see you in, after seven years. You will come here again and forget the troubles that kingdom brings. You are lonely at Tara. I used to sing for you. Shall I come to Tara and sing for you again?

CORMAC. But Diarmuid and Finn — you cannot come to Tara until they have made peace. I have persuaded Finn to make peace and I have brought him here... But we go on saying this one thing again and again.

GRANIA. HOW will it all end? What a broil it has been since that night at Tara.

CORMAC. Never did men sleep as we slept that night over our ale. We sat at that table like stones till the cock crew. We woke together at the crowing of the cock, and Finn cried out, “Grania has been taken from me.”

GRANIA. I thought that Finn did not love me, that you made the marriage that you might be stronger than any other king or than any invader.

CORMAC. Ah, Grania, you have your mother's eyes. Your mother was very beautiful, Grania.

GRANIA. I thought nothing but this: that a man should love me among the woods, far among the woods.

CORMAC. And Diarmuid has loved this fair face very dearly.

GRANIA. But in this valley love has become terrible and we are sometimes afraid of one another. And now I would have Diarmuid arm the shepherds and lead them against the Lochlanders and drive them into their galleys.

CORMAC. If you think like this, why did you stand looking down the valley and saying nothing? Diarmuid asked you, and I asked you.

GRANIA. If I had said "yes" to you, I should have said "no" to Diarmuid. I would say nothing but leave things to work out, whatever will may be in them.
[Enter Niall and the King's Councillors. Councillors stand in the background. Niall advances].

CORMAC. Yes, Niall, I have delayed too long.

GRANIA. *[Going to Niall].* You are going now, Niall, and I have had little time to speak with you, and I would have spoken to you about the days at Tara, when you were my only playfellow. How well I remember going with you, one spring morning to a little pool at the edge of the wood. We sat on the high bank fishing for roach. Have you forgotten?

NIALL. NO, Princess, I have not forgotten. That same day I showed you a blackbird sitting on her nest. You had never seen a bird sitting on her nest

before. But how many things have happened since then: you know the woodland now better than I.

GRANIA. Shall I ever see Tara again? I have wandered a long way.

CORMAC. Five days' journey from here, Grania. We must hurry, neither Niall nor I can keep the saddle for many hours at a time: Diarmuid's cattle are coming this way and their sides are heavy with the rich grass of the valley which I have given you, and the rooks are flying home.
[Enter Diarmuid].

CORMAC. I shall be with Finn in half an hour and I would not say to him the words you bade me say last night. Do not send me to the man you wronged with the words you spoke last night.

DIARMUID. Tell him to be gone out of my valley.

CORMAC. Then farewell, dear daughter.

GRANIA. Father stay with us; Diarmuid, do you not hear? Do you not understand?

CORMAC. Diarmuid knows how great Finn's anger will be when I bring him this answer.

DIARMUID. I have fought Finn and overthrown him. Did I not break out of the house with the seven doors when he had set a watch at all doors? I went out of the door where he himself held the watch and my sword struck the sword out of his hand.

CORMAC. If you will send me with this answer, so be it. I can say no more. Farewell to all here.
[Exeunt Cormac, Niall and Councillors].

DIARMUID. We thought we should weary of the silence of this valley but it is of their voices that we weary. Why should we listen to anything except one another. But they are gone at last, and care is gone with them, and we are alone again with ourselves and our flocks and herds. Come to the door Grania and see my black bull in the meadow. *[Coming down the stage to her].* Do you not believe that care is gone with them?

GRANIA. YOU saw my father's face as he went out. His look has put a deep care into my heart.

DIARMUID. These northern raiders will not dare to move from their galleys. They will soon sail away, and should we give up our happiness because we fear they may carry off a few score of cattle?

GRANIA. Let it be as you wish it, Diarmuid.

DIARMUID. But oath upon oath is broken. I broke my oath to Finn, and now I break the oath which binds me to take up arms against all invaders. Grania, you would like to see Tara again. You would like to see Finn again.

GRANIA. I gave up Tara for your sake, Diarmuid, and that was easier than to live in this valley.

DIARMUID. Ah, you are weary of this valley. But Finn and I are divided, Grania, as by the sea, and if the peace your father has made between us is not to be broken, Finn must leave my valley. It is for your sake, Grania, that he would have me among his Fianna again.

GRANIA. He has not seen me for seven years.

DIARMUID. TO see you once is enough, Grania.

GRANIA. I think that it is for Eri's sake he would have you among the Fianna again. He does not think of women. Why should a woman think of him? Have I not loved you for seven years, Diarmuid? And my father has told you that Finn is bound by an oath and that he has said, "Diarmuid has his love; let him keep her."

DIARMUID. He will not break his oath, but he will find some way out of it. There is always treachery behind his peacemaking.

GRANIA. He made peace with Goll and that peace is still unbroken.
Yet it was Goll's father who plundered Finn's country and murdered his people.

DIARMUID. Goll does Finn's bidding although he might be chief man himself. But Finn has not forgiven. Usheen saw a look in his eyes at Tara.

GRANIA. Ah, how well you remember. That was seven years ago.

DIARMUID. And when I am dead it will be Goll's turn.

GRANIA. Unhappy brooding man, you will neither believe in Finn's oath nor in my love.

DIARMUID. Here we have everything we sought for. But in return for this kingdom your father would have me among the Fianna again.
I thought we should live and die here, I thought our children would grow up about us here, if the gods accept my offering and give us children. *[He goes*

up the stage]. Come, look at the sleepy evening. These evenings are better than the evenings of battle long ago, and were I among my old companions again, Usheen, Goll,
Caoelte, I should look back upon these quiet evenings when the flock came home and you gave me my supper in the dusk. *[Comes down the stage].* If I were to die, Grania, would you be Finn's wife?

GRANIA. HOW did such a thought come into your mind?

DIARMUID. My life began with you and it ends with you. Oh, that these breasts should belong to another, and the usage of this body. Life of my life, I knew you before I was born, I made a bargain with this brown hair before the beginning of time and it shall not be broken through unending time. And yet I shall sit alone upon that shore that is beyond the world — though all the gods are there, the shore shall be empty because one is not there, and I shall weep remembering how we wandered among the woods. But you say nothing Grania. You are weary of the shadows of these mountains and of the smell of the fold. It is many days since you came to my bed and it is many weeks since I have seen an ornament upon you. Your love is slipping from me, it slips away like the water in the brook. You do not answer. These silences make me afraid.

GRANIA. Then, Diarmuid, go to your old companions.

DIARMUID. My old companions? What shall I say to them?

GRANIA. You will fight shoulder to shoulder with Finn and Caoelte.
You will listen to Usheen's harp playing, and I shall love you better when you come to me with the reek of battle upon you.

DIARMUID. We shall be again what we were to one another. You are not that Grania I wandered with among the woods.

GRANIA. You are no longer that Diarmuid who overthrew Finn at the house of the seven doors.

DIARMUID. You speak the truth, Grania. I should have gone to the Fianna. Now it is too late.

GRANIA. Cormac cannot have reached the ford, you will overtake him. *[She goes to her chest and takes out an ornament],*

DIARMUID. Who is the shepherd, Grania? I have never seen him before. Where has he come from?

GRANIA. What shepherd do you speak of?

DIARMUID. There, there in the doorway.

GRANIA. There is nobody there.

DIARMUID. He beckons me — I must follow — *[He goes towards the door],* I see him no longer. A mist must have come in my eyes. I see clearer now and there is no one. But I must follow.

GRANIA. Whom would you follow?

DIARMUID. I see no one now and yet there was a sudden darkening of the light and a shepherd carrying a hazel stick came into the doorway and beckoned me.

GRANIA. NO, Diarmuid, nobody has come into that doorway.

DIARMUID. Nobody came for you, but one came for me. Let me go, Grania.

GRANIA. NO, no, it is a warning that you must not go.

DIARMUID. That is not how I understand the warning. I am bidden to leave this valley. He beckoned me. I am bidden to the Fianna.

[They go out. Enter Laban, who sits down at her wheel and begins to spin. Grania enters shortly after, she stands by the door looking after Diarmuid].

GRANIA. He is like one whose mind is shaken. His thoughts are far away and I do not know what they are.

LABAN. He is brooding over that story Conan told him at Tara — it has been in his mind all day.

GRANIA. And before he left me he saw a shepherd where there was nobody.

LABAN. A shepherd with a Druid hazel stick.

GRANIA. It is better that he should live among his old companions.
He talks one moment of Finn's crookedness; and at another of my love as if it were waning... In a few minutes, Diarmuid and Finn will meet.

LABAN. In a few minutes, Finn will stand with his hand on Diarmuid's shoulder.

GRANIA. Then I have done well in sending him to Finn. I did it for Diarmuid's sake, and for my father's sake and for the sake of my father's kingdom. I chose Diarmuid because he was young and comely, but oh, how

can I forget the greatness of Finn. He has gone to bring Finn to me. In a few minutes Finn and his Fianna will stand under this roof.

LABAN. That is true, my daughter, sit beside me here and tell me what happened to you when you left Tara.

GRANIA. When we left Tara we came to a little glade on the hillside and we heard there a sudden and a beautiful singing of birds, and we saw a red fox creeping in the grass.

LABAN. And then?

GRANIA. And then we saw a young man sitting in the long grass.

LABAN. What did he say?

GRANIA. He was but a herdsman's son seeking a master and so Diarmuid took him into his service, and yet, Mother, I think that he was greater than Diarmuid or I, for he gave us much good service, and so much good counsel. He never put us in a cave that had not two mouths, or let us take refuge in an island that had not two harbours, nor eat our food where we had cooked it, nor sleep where we had eaten it. He never let us lie for many hours in one place, and he often changed our sleeping places in the middle of the night.

LABAN. What name did he bid you call him?

GRANIA. He bid us call him, Mudham. But I think he had some great and beautiful name did we but know it. Have you ever seen him,
Mother?

LABAN. It is said that none who have seen him have been long content with any mortal lover.

GRANIA. I have been content with Diarmuid nigh on seven years.

LABAN. Did you ever hear that beautiful singing of birds again?

GRANIA. Yes, I heard them sing by the banks of a river; I heard them when Diarmuid broke his oath to Finn. We had wandered by the banks of a river nine days, and Mudham fished for us, and every day we hung an uncooked salmon on a tree as a token to Finn. On the tenth day we hung a cooked salmon, for on the ninth night a sword had not lain between us — but Mother, I can tell you no more. I would have you tell me, you who know all things, what is passing in the valley. Have Finn and Diarmuid made friends? Has Diarmuid passed the fires of the Fianna without speaking?

LABAN. They have spoken, and they are on their way hither, so forget them for a while, and tell me if you are happy in this valley.

GRANIA. I stand by the door of this house, seeing the hours wane, waiting for Diarmuid to come home from his hunting. Nothing has happened until to-day, and now Diarmuid and Finn are walking up the valley together, reconciled at last. I had come to think I should never look on a stirring day again, and I had thought to send all the thread you would spin to be woven into a grass green web on which to embroider my wanderings with Diarmuid among the woods. I should have been many years embroidering it, but when it was done and hung round this room, I should have seen birds, beasts, and leaves which ever way I turned, and Diarmuid and myself wandering among them.

LABAN. But now you have thrown the doors wide open and the days are streaming in upon you again.

GRANIA. Yes, yes, have I done rightly? Had I not sent Diarmuid to Finn, the broil would have begun again... I must put on my jewels. The Fianna will be here in a moment, and Finn has never seen me in my jewels. Spin for me, Mother, spin for me; tell me I have done rightly. But no, they are coming. I can hear their footsteps. Go to the serving men and bid them take the drinking horns and the flagons from the cupboard. *[Exit Laban. Grania stands before a long brazen mirror that hangs upon the wall, and puts the gold circlet about her head and the heavy bracelets upon her arm, and the great many-coloured cloak upon her which she fastens with an emerald clasp. She puts a gold girdle about her waist. Enter Cormac, Finn, Caoelte, Diarmuid and others of the Fianna. Diarmuid is talking to Finn. Enter servants with flagons of ale, drinking horns and torches).* Welcome Usheen, welcome Caoelte, welcome Goll and all the noble Fianna into my house. I am happy that such men shall stand under my roof. The shepherds of Ben Bulben will tell each other many years after we are dead that Finn, Usheen, Caoelte, and Goll stood under this roof. *[Grania goes to her father and leads him to a high seat].* You cannot go from us now, for I am too glad for leave taking.

CORMAC. I will stay a little while, and will drink a horn of ale with this noble company who will defend Eri against the men of Lochland.

DIARMUID. We have been here but three moons and have not had time to build a house great enough for ourselves and for our people. This winter we shall build a house of oak wood great enough for two hundred people to sleep under its pillars. All the Fianna who come shall sleep under our roof.

GRANIA. When you speak of their coming, you make us think of their leave-taking, and I would forget that they shall ever leave us.

CORMAC. Eri is safe now that her great men are united.

CAOELTE. For a long while when we lighted our fires at night, there was no fire at which some did not side with Finn, some with Diarmuid. But at last those that were of Finn's party and those that were of Diarmuid's party gathered about different fires. And this year the fires were lighted far apart.

USHEEN. And time wore on until one day the swords were out and the earth red underfoot.

FINN. If all Eri were red under foot, it was but Grania's due that men in coming times might know of the love she had put into men's hearts.

[He puts his hand on Diarmuid's shoulder. Two serving men go round with ale. Grania stops them and takes the flagons from them].

GRANIA. It is right that I should serve the ale on such a day as this.

CORMAC. My daughter must not pour out the ale.

USHEEN. If Grania pours out the ale we shall sleep sound to-night.

CORMAC. YOU have spoken folly, Usheen... I, I spoke out of a dream. Grania, since you have taken the flagons from your serving men, serve us. But I would you had not done this.

[Grania goes round filling each one's horn with ale. Diarmuid and Finn are still standing together on the right. She pauses, considering for an instant, and then fills Finn's horn]

CAOELTE. Diarmuid, we have not spoken to you nor seen you these seven years.

GOLL. Have you no word for us?

USHEEN. We would drink with you.
[Diarmuid goes up the stage and joins the group who are standing half way up the stage, near to where the King is sitting].

GRANIA. In this ale you will not drink sleep, but you will drink forgetfulness of me, and friendship for Diarmuid.

FINN. Had I known that you would speak like this I would not have come to your house.

GRANIA. But you have come here for this.

USHEEN. It is not enough for Finn and Diarmuid to drink together; they must be bound together by the blood bond. They must be made brothers before the gods. They must be bound together.

CAOELTE. Yes, yes, one of you there by the door — you Finmole — cut a sod of grass with your sword. They must be bound together.

DIARMUID. *[Ashe comes down the stage, he draws his sword].* Finn, draw blood out of your hand as I draw blood out of mine.
[Finn pricks his hand with his dagger and goes towards Diarmuid and lets blood from his hand drop into Diarmuid's cup. Diarmuid lets the blood from his hand drop into the cup also. He gives the cup to Finn]. Speak the holy words, Finn.

FINN. *[Having drunk out of the cup].*
This bond has bound us
Like son to father
Let him who breaks it
Be driven from the thresholds
Of God-kind and man-kind.
[Diarmuid takes the cup and drinks].

DIARMUID. — Let the sea bear witness,
Let the wind bear witness,
Let the earth bear witness,
Let the fire bear witness,
Let the dew bear witness,
Let the stars bear witness.
[Finn takes the cup and drinks].

FINN. — Six that are deathless
Six holy creatures
Have witnessed the binding.
[A sod of grass is handed in through the door and from man to man till it comes to Usheen and Caoelte who hold it up one on each side. First Finn and then Diarmuid pass under it].

CAOELTE. They are of one blood.

USHEEN. They have been born again out of the womb of the earth.

CAOELTE. Give back the sod to the ground. Give the holy sod to the Goddess.

[The Fianna pass the sod from one to another and out through the door, each one speaking these words over it in a monotonous and half audible muttering: "Blessed is the Goddess. May the ground be blessed."].

GOLL. This bond has shown that Finn can forgive. It has been said falsely that he never forgives although he has forgiven me. Finn has forgiven Goll. *[Finn turns to Goll effusively].*

CORMAC. Now my errand is done and I shall bid Grania and Diarmuid and all this goodly company farewell.
[He rises but lingers, talking with certain of his Councillors].

DIARMUID. I have done this though you have followed me and hunted me through the woods of Eri for seven years.

FINN. I forgave you because we had need of you, Diarmuid. *[Turning away]*. Although you left the Fianna for a woman.

DIARMUID. Grania, pour out the ale for Finn.

FINN. It is right for a man to have a time for love, but now you are with your old companions again.

DIARMUID. I did not accept the peace you offered me at once, because I had taken Grania from you.

FINN. *[Looking at Grania*]. It seems a long while ago, Grania. You should have been my wife seven years ago.

GRANIA. Then it was not for me that you followed Diarmuid so many years. Why did you follow him? What reason could you have had, if it all

seems so long ago.

FINN. Our marriage was to have mended an old crack in the land. It was to have joined the Fianna to the High King for ever, but it was not for this marriage's sake that I followed Diarmuid. I followed him because he had broken his oath.

DIARMUID. I shall make atonement for the breaking of my oath with fifty heads of cattle, and I will give you my black bull. Come to the door, and you will see him in the valley. He is grazing on the edge of the herd and you will see what a noble stride he has. But who is this with two of the Fianna, this fat man in the sheep skin. It is my enemy Conan. I shall be glad to drink a horn of ale with him to the forgetfulness of all enmity. [To *the others*.] I have not seen you for seven years and seven years have changed some here a little. I would drink with every one of you. I would that you had but a single hand that I might hold it this day, this happy day.
[Enter Conan with Griffan and Fergus and a shepherd].

CONAN. Keep your spears in your hands. We are only just in time... a great beast... come... come... we will be in front of him before he can run into the wood.

[Exeunt Conan and all the Fianna except Finn],

DIARMUID. I thought I had driven off the last of the wolves.

[Diarmuid goes out. There are only Cormac, Finn, Grania and a shepherd on the stage].

SHEPHERD. He is not a wolf! He is not a wolf! He has gored twenty of my sheep. He broke out by the stepping stones.

[He goes out].

GRANIA. The shepherd said it was not a wolf, ask him.

FINN. He said it has gored twenty of his sheep. It must be the boar I heard of as I came hither. It has come out of a dark wood to the eastward... a wood men are afraid of.

GRANIA. Then Diarmuid must not go to this hunting. I will call him. *[She goes to the door].* He is standing on the hillside. He is coming towards us. That is well. *[Coming down the stage to Finn],* So it was not for my sake that you followed Diarmuid. This flight and this pursuit for seven years were for no better reason than the breaking of an oath.

FINN. I followed Diarmuid because I hated him.

GRANIA. But now you have forgiven him. You are friends again. Yes, Finn, I would have you friends but my wish can be nothing to you.
I was proud to think you followed Diarmuid for me, but you have said it was to avenge the breaking of an oath. This is a man's broil.
No woman has part in it.

FINN. Cormac told me that it was you who persuaded Diarmuid to bring me to this house, and but for this, I would not have come.

GRANIA. It was well that you came. Men who are so great as Finn and Diarmuid must be friends. My father fears a landing of the men of Lochland, and I am weary of this valley where there is nothing but the rising and the setting of the sun and the grazing of flocks and herds.

FINN. Did you send for me because you are weary of this valley?

GRANIA. I wanted to see you because of your greatness. I loved Diarmuid... he was young and comely and you seemed to me to be old, you were grey.

FINN. I am seven years older now, and my hair is greyer. I must seem very old to you now.

GRANIA. No, you seem younger. As you stand there, as you lean upon your spear, you seem to me a young man. I do not think of your grey hair any longer.

FINN. That day in Tara you would not wear your ornaments, but now you wear them.
[Diarmuid comes slowly down the stage].

DIARMUID. What have you to say to one another; what were you saying to Grania, Finn? I can see by Grania's face that she is but little pleased to see me again.

GRANIA. Why do you say this? What has happened, Diarmuid? That shepherd said the wolf had killed twenty sheep.

DIARMUID. There is no wolf in the thicket; they do not know what they are hunting. *[Enter Conan].* No matter whether it be a wolf or a boar that is hiding there, I have come in to find you and Finn talking together in a way that is not to my liking.

[Cormac and the Fianna enter).

FINN. Was it to watch me, Diarmuid, that you came back again? And would you not have me speak to Grania? As you will, then. *[Turning to*

Conan). Conan is listening. What has he to say about this beast that has gored twenty sheep?

CONAN. And Diarmuid has come back again because he saw it was a boar and not a wolf, and he remembered that day in Tara, when I told him he is to go out hunting a boar and be killed by it, and
Diarmuid is to be torn by the tusks, he is to be bloody, his face shall be foul because it shall be bloody. I told him these things in Tara, and he remembers them, that is why he has not gone out hunting.

DIARMUID. Finn has contrived the trap for me, but I shall not fall into it. There can be no peace between Finn and me.
[He draws his sword].

FINN. *[Who draws his sword].* By the drawing of his sword, Diarmuid has broken the peace I gave him, and the sight of Grania has brought to mind all the wrongs he has done me.

GRANIA. To you, Finn, I say that I would not have sent for you had I thought that the broil would begin again. To you, Diarmuid, I say that I will speak to what man I please, that no man shall thwart me. Where is my father? *[Turning suddenly towards them].* No, I will not have you fight for me. Forbid them, father.
[She goes to Cormac].

DIARMUID. Our swords shall decide between us. I shall slay you, Finn.

FINN. One of us two shall die.
[They draw their swords, and the Fianna rush between them].

GOLL. Finn and Diarmuid cannot fight — fling up their swords, thrust the spear between them. Has Finn forgotten the blood bond? He who raises his hand against the blood bond raises his hand against the gods.

CONAN. *[Coming towards them].* If Finn and Diarmuid cannot fight with one another, let them hunt the boar, and let Grania be given to him who kills it. Aonghus, who watches over lovers and hunters shall decide between them.

[Diarmuid lifts his sword to strike. Leaving her father, Grania comes forward].

GRANIA. He is not worthy enough for you to strike him — give me your sword.

FINN. *[Standing in front of Conan].* No, Grania, he shall not die, he has spoken the truth. Finn and Diarmuid love the one woman.

CONAN. A tale I once told him has given him no stomach for the hunting of a boar.

FERGUS. The boar is bigger than any beast I ever saw.

GRIFFAN. It is certainly no mortal beast.

DIARMUID. What was its colour, was it covered with bristles?

CONAN. I saw it; it was black and bristleless. *[He goes over and stands by Diarmuid].* Finn, Caoelte, Usheen look at us; there is one terror in the heart of Diarmuid and Conan.

GRIFFAN. I saw it too, it was dark like the sea, and it made a noise like the sea in a storm.

FINN. We listen to the idle tales of spearmen. Whatever the colour of the beast may be, we shall slay it. *[The Fianna move up the stage].*
Conan has spoken well. Diarmuid has little stomach for this hunting. Why did he ask for the blood bond? It was not I who went to him... it was he who came to me with his hand pricked with his dagger. These are the only wounds he will dare. This blood bond keeps him from my sword and he speaks of an old tale that he may not go to the hunt. Diarmuid is craven.

DIARMUID. Finn lies; he knows why I will not go to this hunt. He seeks my death because he loves Grania.

FERGUS. If Diarmuid does not go to this hunt, Diarmuid is craven.

GRIFFAN. Finn has said it, he is craven.

CAOELTE. Diarmuid must not go to this hunt. You have done wickedly this day, Conan, and after your kind.

FATHNA. He has a hare's heart. The gods have given him a hare's heart.

FINN. Take up your spears. We will go against this beast, let him who will stay behind.

DIARMUID. Go against the boar, but it shall be as if you hunted the sea or the wind. Your spears shall break, and your hounds fly and whimper at your heels.
[Exeunt all except Grania, Cormac, and Diarmuid. After a moment's pause a horn is heard in the distance. Diarmuid takes a spear from the wall].

GRANIA. Why do you take your spear... you will not go to this hunt?

DIARMUID. This beast came to slay us. This hunt will sweep over us. It is coming through the woods, and I shall be caught up like a leaf.

[They bar the door and stand listening].

GRANIA. They said the boar ran into the woods — it will have gone into the mountain before this.

DIARMUID. The things to come are like the wind; they could sweep this house away. This image of death is coming like the wind — who knows what enchantment has called it out of the earth? It was not here yesterday; it was not here at noon. I have hunted deer in these woods and have not seen the slot of natural or unnatural swine. No, it will not bear thinking of. I am caught in this valley like a wolf in a pit... *[Pause].* Cormac, you sit there like a stone, why did you do this? You came here with a tale about the men of Lochland, but you were on the gods' business.

CORMAC. I gave you this valley to be happy in.

DIARMUID. When we are about to die, the gods give us more than we ask. There has been too much happiness here for our hunger, and I would roll up the broken meats in a sack for you to carry them away.

GRANIA. That tale has shaken your mind.

DIARMUID. Then you do not believe in it.

GRANIA. We believe, we disbelieve, and there is a time when we do not know what we think.

DIARMUID. We are always on the gods' business. Cormac in craftiness, you in lust; they put lust into women's bodies that men may not defy the gods who made them. I, too, shall be on their business in this hunting.

GRANIA. YOU are not going to this hunting.

DIARMUID. I see many ornaments upon you. How long is it since you have worn them for me? You have not worn them... we are common to one another night and day.

GRANIA. Take your Broad Edge, your heavy spear. Take your heavy shield.

DIARMUID. NO man shall say Diarmuid went to this hunting with his battle gear upon him. *[Exit].*

GRANIA. He is gone to this hunting... he is gone that he may give me to Finn.
[She turns her face towards the wall and weeps].

CORMAC. Have you ceased to love him? *[Grania walks a few steps towards her father as if she were going to speak but her emotion overpowers her, and she returns to the same place].* If you have not ceased to love him, follow him and bring him back.

GRANIA. I will follow him in the woods; he will take the path under the oak trees.
[Exit Grania].

CORMAC. *[Coming down the stage].* Laban! Laban! *[Going to the door at the side].* They have all followed the hunters... there is nobody in the

house... but Laban must be here. Laban! Laban!

[He goes to the wheel and takes the distaff in his hand]. There is no more flax in the distaff.

[Exit].

Curtain

ACT III.

The wooded slopes of Ben Bulben. Diarmuid is sleeping under a tree. It is night but the dawn is beginning to break. Enter two peasants].

OLD MAN. There has been no such night as this these fifty years.

YOUNG MAN. HOW the wind rages, like the dragon or maybe it is the dragon himself. Listen, a tree has fallen.

OLD MAN. It is only the wind, I have seen wind like this before, and then the sheep were lost in the torrent.

YOUNG MAN. I met a herdsman whose cattle had broken out of their byres, and fifty drowned themselves in the lake.

OLD MAN. The Fianna frightened them... the Fianna came into the forest at midnight sounding their horns.

YOUNG MAN. And at midnight I saw two hosts fighting, one host flying and one following, and among them that were flying an old one armed man.

OLD MAN. That was Diarmuid’s grandfather; he has been dead this fifty years.

YOUNG MAN. But I saw something more.

OLD MAN. What did you see, boy?

YOUNG MAN. A gaunt grey ragged man, and he was driving this beast the Fianna are hunting. He drove it along the edge of the mountain prodding it before him with a spear.

OLD MAN. That was the god Aonghus. He watches over Diarmuid. The deaths of all these great men are foretold, and the end of the Fianna. They will perish as their forefathers did when Cairbre Cathead called the folk together and broke their power for two hundred years.

YOUNG MAN. Tell me about Cairbre Cathead.

OLD MAN. Not now; we must go in search for our sheep. If I have lost my ram, my ewes will be useless to me. We must go now, for at daybreak the Fianna will be sounding their horns. They were sounding them till the moon went down; it was they who frightened my sheep.

YOUNG MAN. But this hunting, will the boar be killed?

OLD MAN. It is no great matter to us, maybe a little less damage to our fields that is all. The seasons will be none the better, the cows will have no more milk in their udders; and my lambs, there will be no lambs next year.

YOUNG MAN. When the Fianna have killed the boar they will give us some parts of it.

OLD MAN. The Fianna have no thoughts for such as we. All that they do not eat of the boar they will throw to their dogs; they would not think it well for us to taste meat. They beat back the invader when they can and it is more than our lives are worth to pick up a dead hare from the path.

YOUNG MAN. Hush, there is a man sleeping under the tree. If we do not wake him the beast may come upon him sleeping.

OLD MAN. Better do nothing, we must not do anything against the gods. The god Aonghus will save him if it be pleasing to him to do so, or he may

call him away. Let us begone, boy, let us find our sheep.
[Exit].

DIARMUID. They croak like ravens over carrion — croak, croak, croak.
[Enter Grania}.

GRANIA. I have sought you all night. I have been wandering in the woods since the moon went down.

DIARMUID. What have you come for?

GRANIA. I was afraid and have been running; give me time to draw my breath.

DIARMUID. Your hair is down and your hands are torn with brambles.

GRANIA. Yes, look at my hands, and I am so weary, Diarmuid. I am so weary that I could lie down and die here. That mossy bank is like a bed; lay me down there. Oh, I have come to bring you home with me.

DIARMUID. And you show me torn hands, and you hold out to me wet hair, and would have me go home. You talk of dying too, and would have me lay you on this bank. But what good is there in all this, Grania, for I have no time to listen.

GRANIA. Give up this hunting for I have had warning that you will die if you do not turn back. Turn before we lose ourselves in the darkness of the woods.

DIARMUID. I am in a little way that leads to darkness, but what does that matter to you, Grania? Your way home winds along the hill and down into

the valley; my way is a different way, a shorter way, and the morrows that men live frighten me more than this short way. I have no heart for that crooked road of morrows.

GRANIA. *[Wringing her hands].* Come to our home, Diarmuid, come to our house.

DIARMUID. All the roads, the straight road and the crooked road, lead to blackness. If blackness be the end and there is no light beyond it? But what have such questions to do with me? Whatever road I am on, I will walk firmly with my sword out. *[He draws his sword].* But you have come to tell me something. What is it? Out with it quickly for the day is breaking, and when it is broken there will be no hunting.

GRANIA. I have come to ask you to go home with me.

DIARMUID. YOU would have me in the straight road, and so you have come to tell me that I am in it. For it is certain that a man walks where he thinks he walks. The mind makes all; we will talk of that some day. I tell you that you are lying to me. I am not in the road that leads on and on, and then shatters under one's feet, and becomes flying bits of darkness.

GRANIA. Diarmuid, you are going straight upon your death, if you do not come back with me.

DIARMUID. What do you know of all this that you come like a soothsayer? Who has been whispering in your ear? Who has sent you to me?

GRANIA. I had a warning last night.

DIARMUID. From that old woman who spins? I tell you I have had enough of her warnings. I saw her last night carrying a bundle of new flax through the woods.

GRANIA. No, Diarmuid, I left her in the house.

DIARMUID. I tell you I saw her. She is going somewhere on some evil work. But where is she going with the new flax? What have you come to tell me about her?

GRANIA. I have come to tell you of a dream that came to me last night.

DIARMUID. Well, what did the dream tell you?

GRANIA. I dreamt I was sitting by Finn.

DIARMUID. I do not think much of that dream, for I saw you yesterday walking with Finn and holding his hands.

GRANIA. But I dreamed I was sitting by Finn, and that your shield was hanging among the shields of the slain over our heads.

DIARMUID. Did you not say it was a bad dream? I have heard worse dreams than that. Ah, foolish gods, can you find nothing better than the dreams of an unfaithful wife to vex and shake my will.

GRANIA. Do not blaspheme against the gods for they are near to us now. I have been praying to them to spare you. I have been praying to them all night, while I looked for you.

DIARMUID. Yes, every man is a god in heaven, and on earth we are the hurly balls they drive hither and thither — oh, they are great hurly players.

The camauns are never out of their hands. All night I have heard them laughing. I tell you I have heard them laughing. Do you not hear me? Do you not hear me?

GRANIA. I hear, but oh, Diarmuid, take my hands and touch my hair. They may bring some memory to your mind, some softness to your heart.

DIARMUID. Yes, yes, I remember well enough. Your hands and your hair were sweet to me long ago. No, no, yesterday, even yesterday. Let me see your hands. They are beautiful hands, torn as they are. No wonder I love them; and this hair too. You loved me once, Grania, you loved me better than Finn. I remember it all the day before yesterday.

GRANIA. I love you still, Diarmuid.

DIARMUID. My dear one, why did you send me to Finn? It may be that my words have been a little wild. Speak quickly, do not be afraid.

GRANIA. I sent you to Finn, because I wanted you to live among the Fianna as before you saw me.

DIARMUID. All you say is true.

GRANIA. I wanted you to be friends with Finn, because your love had become a sickness, a madness.

DIARMUID. Yes, yes, it has become a madness. But it is a long while, Grania, since we were alone together.

GRANIA. No, Diarmuid not long.

DIARMUID. Yesterday is a long while and there may be no other time for wringing this secret from you. There was a thought of Finn in your mind when you sent me to him.

GRANIA. There is no secret in me; I have told you everything. And I come through this wood by night, to bring you from this hunt, as a wife comes to her husband.

DIARMUID. Grania was not meant to sit by the fireside with children on her knees. The gods made her womb barren because she was not meant to hold children on her knees. The gods gave her a barren womb, hungry and barren like the sea. She looked from the red apple in her hand to the green apple on the bough. She looked from me to Finn, even when she first lusted for me, and after Finn there will be some other. The malignant gods made your beauty, Grania. Your hand is very weak, your arm is weak and fragile. Your hair is very soft. *[He takes her by the hair],* I could kill you as easily as I could kill a flower by the wayside.

GRANIA. Kill me if you will, kill me with your sword, here in my breast.

DIARMUID. You would have me kill you. Maybe if I killed you, all would be well.

GRANIA. Hold fast my hair, draw back my head and kill me. I would have you do it... *[Pause].* Why do you not do it? If you would go to this hunting, you must do it; for while I live, you shall not go.

DIARMUID. Let go my spear, I say; let go my spear, if you would have your life. I see that you are thinking of Finn this very moment. I see

thoughts of Finn in your eyes. Let me go, or I will let the lust out of you with this sword point.

GRANIA. Kill me, Diarmuid, I would have you do it.

DIARMUID. And leave this white body like a cut flower on the wayside.

GRANIA. Kill me, Diarmuid.

DIARMUID. I have heard the gods laugh, and I have been merry, but if I killed you I would remember everything. And I should wander in the woods seeing white and red flowers — after killing you I might kill myself — oh, that would be a good thing to do. But seeing you there, your soft hair spattered with blood, and your white hands stained with blood, I might not remember to do it. I might remember nothing but yesterday and to-day. I cannot kill you. I would not see your blood nor touch your hands. Your lips and teeth, and all this beauty I have loved seem in my eyes no better than a yellow pestilence. Grania, Grania, out of my sight. *[He goes out driving her before him. A moment after he returns alone]*. That is over, let me think. Yes, yes, there is a beast coming that I am to kill. I should take him so, upon my spear. The spear will be my best weapon, but the hand must be steady beneath it. If the point slipped he would be upon me. Maybe it will be better to let him run upon my shield and kill him with my sword, while he digs his tusks into my shield. My danger will be the darkness, for the darkness makes the hand shake, and day breaks but slowly. Higher up in the woods there is a little more light.

[He goes out. Enter Caoelte and Usheen].

CAOELTE. We have hardly escaped with our lives. The branches touched me as the tree fell.

USHEEN. What made that great ash tree fall?

CAOELTE. The wind had lulled and yet it crashed across our way as if it would kill us.

USHEEN. I heard a thud and a crackling of branches before it fell, as though a great rock had been thrown against it, though I saw nothing, and for some time I had heard crashings in the woods. I think that hosts have been hurling rocks at one another. All night there has been fighting on the earth, and in the air, and in the water.

CAOELTE. Never was there such a night before. As I came by the river
I saw swans fighting in the air, and three fell screaming into the tree tops.

USHEEN. Have you seen how Finn's hounds whimper at his heels?

CAOELTE. They whimper and cry till the touch of his hand gives them courage for a moment. They would not follow him at all were they not afraid of being left alone... *[They walk to and fro — a pause].*
That light must be the beginning of the day. A pale foolish light that makes the darkness worse. The sky and earth would turn to their old works again but they have been palsy struck. Let us put this darkness out of our minds. Find us something to talk of, Usheen. Where is Diarmuid?

DIARMUID. *[Coming forward].* Diarmuid is here, waiting whatever may befall him. Tell Finn that though the mountain arose like an ox from sleep, and came against me, and though the clouds came like eagles, and the sea upon its feet that are without number, I would not turn from this hunting.

CAOELTE. We have been seeking you. We would have you leave this hunting.

DIARMUID. It may be that you fear, and that Finn fears, because of the falling of trees and the screaming of swans, but I do not fear.

CAOELTE. Turn from this hunting, Diarmuid.

DIARMUID. I would not, had I nothing but a reason no bigger than a pea, and I have weighty reasons.

CAOELTE. It were no wonder if even we, whose death at a hunt like this has not been foretold, should turn from this hunting. For we are following no mortal beast. A man who had been trapping otters followed the footmarks last night, not knowing what they were, and as he followed they grew greater and greater and further and further apart.

DIARMUID. The night is dark.

CAOELTE. But the footmarks were deep. Deeper than any made by a mortal beast.

DIARMUID. It came yesterday out of the woods like a blight, like a flood, like a toad stool, and now it grows bigger and bigger. But so much more the need for hunters. Goodbye, comrades. Goodbye.
[Exit].

CAOELTE. I would not follow where he has gone. He is among those broken rocks where I heard screams, and sounds as of battle. They say that dwarfs and worse things have their homes among those rocks.

USHEEN. He is the only one among us who has not been shaken by this night of terror. Look, look something is coming this way.

CAOELTE. A tall staff in his hand, and he moves noiselessly, and there is another following him.

USHEEN. Draw your sword, Caoelte.

CAOELTE. It will not come out of its sheath. It is but a shepherd. We are craven and no better than Conan.

[Enter two peasants].

OLD MAN. Be of good heart, great deliverer of Eri. I am but a shepherd looking for his sheep, and not, as well might be, some bad thing out of the rocks.

YOUNG MAN. Can you tell me, noble sirs, of any strayed sheep, or what is troubling the water and the air over our heads?

CAOELTE. We have been wandering in the dark all night. We are as blind as you are.

OLD MAN. We must go, sirs, we must find our sheep or starve.
[Exit peasants].

USHEEN. Maybe he was laughing at us because he was afraid. We must wait here till we hear Finn's horn. If we were to seek him we would lose him, and it may be never come alive out of the woods.

CAOELTE. We had better go further up the hill. Who is this coming?
Since dawn began, the wood has been full of shadows and sound.

They are coming out of the rocks: they rise out of the rocks.

USHEEN. There is one who seems to be pushed along, and if it is but a shadow it is a heavy one. It is Conan. I can see the sheep-skin. I am glad he has not seen our fear.

[Enter Goll, Conan, Griffan, Fathna and two of the Fianna].

GOLL. The night is over at last.

CONAN. The night is over, and the last day has begun. Give me a drink for I can go no further without one.

CAOELTE. We must go further up the hill. We must hurry on if we would find Finn again. Have you seen him? Have you heard his horn?

GOLL. NO, he has not sounded it, but the beast will be stirring.

FATHNA. The last time I saw Finn he was standing on the rock yonder. He stood facing the dawn and shouting to his hounds. When he saw us he shouted that we were to climb up to him. He bellowed like a bull for its heifer.

GRIFFAN. But I had had climbing enough.

CONAN. Sit down; I will go no further. When a man has got to die, is it not better for him to die sitting down than walking about, and better to die on clean ground than in the mire, or up to his middle in water. Give me your ale skin, Caoelte.

CAOELTE. I will not, Conan; you have been asking for it all night.

CONAN. Give me your ale skin Usheen, it is the last drink I shall ever drink.

USHEEN. I will give him a drink; he will not move until we do.
[Usheen gives Conan his ale skin]. Drink and think no more of death.

CONAN. All the disasters that have come to Diarmuid have come to him because of the spilling of the ale out of the flagon; but I have lost both ale and ale skin and must therefore die.

CAOELTE. *[To Fathna*]. We might light a fire, there must be dry leaves under these rocks.

[Fathna and Griffan go together to collect dry leaves and sticks, and they return a moment after with them].

CONAN. We are shivering since we crossed that river; and it was in that river I lost my ale skin; some one plucked it from behind.

CAOELTE. I too am shivering; the day is bleaker than the night.

CONAN. Ah, be careful with the tinder, be careful, for the first leaves are the dry ones — bring the fire a little nearer, I would die warm though I have to get cold after. Make room for me by the fire. Do you not understand that I am going to die — that Conan the Bald is going to die — you will never flout me for my great belly again,
Caoelte.

CAOELTE. You are not going to die, Conan. Here I will give you a drink.

CONAN. Yellow ale, bitter on the tongue, tasting a little of the vat of red yew that it came from... the last drink Conan will ever drink. *[Caoelte and the others talk among themselves*]. They think that all this hurly burly is for Diarmuid, but I know better; you are my friends and I will tell you about it.

CAOELTE. Give me my ale skin, Conan.

CONAN. Not yet, I must drink a little more — and now this is the way it was — it was not the loss of the ale skin that told me I was going to die, that only showed me that some great evil was going to happen — it was a swan screaming in the trees that told me I was going to die. Before I was born, and when yet my mother was carrying with me, towards the seventh month she was one day washing clothes in the river, and she saw three geese swimming; and while one was cackling and billing with its mate, an otter caught it by the leg and dragged it under the water; so my mother knew something was to happen to the child under her belt, and she told me never to cross a river when there were geese about.

CAOELTE. They were swans that screamed in the trees.

CONAN. Are not swans a kind of geese; but how do I know it was not swans my mother saw.

CAOELTE. Conan, give me my ale skin.

CONAN. Why did I keep Finn and Diarmuid from killing one another?
They could have done it so easily in Diarmuid's house.
Why did I bring them to this hunt? Conan has brought his own death upon him.

[Enter Finn],

FINN. We have come upon the slot of a boar in the hills; he can only just have passed by; if we go to the bend of the stream we should come upon him. [To *Conan].* Why are you lying there? We want every man. Get up, we will put you in the gap yonder. The boar shall not escape unless he escapes through you.

CAOELTE. Conan is in terror; he thinks he is going to die.

FINN. Conan, get up or you may have to face this beast alone.

CONAN. DO not believe them; it is not Diarmuid this pig is looking for, it is for me.

FINN. If Conan will not go, let him stay there. Here is a handful more leaves to warm your shins.
[Finn throws some wet leaves on the fire and quenches it].

CONAN. YOU have thrown wet leaves on the fire; now I shall die of cold. But are you leaving me? They all go because Finn has bidden them. You leave me, Goll, yet some day Finn who has put out my fire will put out your life. Is it not the oath of the Fianna to protect one another? Caoelte, Usheen, do you not hear me? *[They go out laughing*]. They are an evil stony-hearted proud race... Rot in the ear wheat, frogs' spawn in the pool, yellow sickness in one's body, henbane in one's drink, lice in my beard, fleas in my sheep skin...
A stony-hearted proud race.
[He follows them out. Enter Grania and Finn].

FINN. You are cold and tired, Grania, and have stumbled through the wood, you are all bruised.

GRANIA. I am bruised and full of wretchedness, and I am very cold; and the dawning of the day frightens me. However, cold as it is, I do not wish to see the sun — but I am cold, oh, the cold.

FINN. There has been a fire here; I will blow the ashes to a blaze.

GRANIA. *[Sitting down].* Why did you not leave me to die where I had chosen.

FINN. The beast we are hunting might have run upon you and you would have been trampled and gored by it. I could not have left you there. The blaze is already beginning; hold your hands to it.

GRANIA. I would that you had left me to be killed by it. You have planned that the death of this boar is to put me on one side or the other, to give me to Diarmuid or to give me to you. But I am no man's spoil. *[Standing up].* You have planned it all between you; your plans are not mine. Go from me, Finn, go to this hunt and kill the boar, make the fire or go where you will.

FINN. Although I lose my chance of killing this beast I must stay with you. I will protect you.

GRANIA. It does not matter. Stay with me here or go to this hunt.

FINN. I will not leave you, if it were to spring upon you from the thicket.

GRANIA. It might be better, for I have done mischief enough. I wished that you and Diarmuid could have made peace and all would have been well, had not this evil thing broken out of the earth.

FINN. Diarmuid and I could not be at peace. The peace we made was a false peace. *[Hunting horns heard in the distance*]. The hounds are at the boar's heels now. I can hear my hounds. Yes, it is Bran. Now it is Skealon. They have found their courage and are driving him from cover to cover. *[Going up the stage].* Listen — now it is
Lomair.

GRANIA. Finn, I beseech you to put the desire of me out of your heart. Be Diarmuid's friend and save him. Kill the boar and save him.

FINN. If I kill the boar, will you belong to me?

GRANIA. Not because you kill the boar.

FINN. If I were there, and Diarmuid here, and this boar coming against me, would Diarmuid save me?

GRANIA. YOU have fought side by side. Will you let him die?

FINN. Why do you wish me to do this?

GRANIA. It was I who sent Diarmuid to you; and by the blood bond, you are brothers.

FINN. Should not a woman's breast be more to me than a man's hand?

GRANIA. But the blood bond — he who breaks it shall be cast out by
God-kind and man-kind.

FINN. I cannot save Diarmuid, his end has been foretold. I cannot change it. The deaths of everyone of us and the end of the Fianna have been foretold. Many will die in a great battle, Oscar who is but a child will die in

it, but I shall die long after by a spear thrust, and Diarmuid by the tusk of a boar, and Usheen will go far away, and Caoelte storm the house of the gods at Assaroe.

[*A cry is heard close by, Finn plunges into the thicket and returns with Diarmuid who has been mortally wounded by the boar. Diarmuid struggles to his feet, and leans against a rock]*.

DIARMUID. Water, is there no water? My life is ebbing out with my blood. *[Finn goes to a well and comes back with water in his hand, but as he holds up his hand the water drips through his fingers].* If
I had water I might not die.

GRANIA. Finn, bring him water in your helmet.
[Diarmuid looks from one to the other].

DIARMUID. Grania and Finn.
[When Finn returns with his helmet filled with water, Diarmuid looks from one to the other, and then whether by accident or design he overturns the helmet].

GRANIA. Why have you done this? Why will you not drink the water that Finn brought you? *[She takes up the helmet and fetches the water herself. Again Diarmuid looks from one to another and puts the water away].* For my sake, for the sake of Grania, I beseech you to drink it.

DIARMUID. It is growing lighter. There is a light coming out of the hill.

FINN. Let me bind up your wounds or in a moment you'll be gone.

DIARMUID. They're about me, they're about me. They were always about me though I could not see them.

FINN. He is dying, they are coming for him.

DIARMUID. There is somebody there by the trees... move me a little that I may see him.
[Finn helps Diarmuid and slightly changes his position. He begins swaying his hand as if to music].

FINN. He hears the harp-playing of Aonghus; it is by music that he leads the dead.

GRANIA. Diarmuid, oh, Diarmuid! Do not look at them. If you do not look at them you will not die. Do not die. You said once that you would be lonely without me among the immortals.

DIARMUID. I cannot hear the harp playing; there is so much noise about me.

GRANIA. He has forgotten me.

FINN. Henceforth his business is with them.

GRANIA. Oh, Diarmuid! Oh, Diarmuid! Oh, Diarmuid!

DIARMUID. Someone spoke to me; No, not the harp player, some other. It was you Finn, who spoke to me. No, no, who was it who spoke to me?
[He falls back dead].

FINN. He is dead: he has died as the son of the gods should die. A friend against whom I have made war is dead. I warred against him for you,

Grania.

[They stand looking at each other for a moment and then Grania goes away and weeps. Enter a young man].

YOUNG MAN. The beast you have been hunting is dead, killed by a spear thrust. Here is the spear.

FINN. The spear is mine; give it to me. *[Walking towards Grania*]. We must send for men to carry the body to the house. *[To the young man].* Go fetch King Cormac, bring him here.
[Exit shepherd],

GRANIA. *[Trying to overcome her emotion].* What did you say, and what are you saying? That spear with the blood upon it in your hand, where did it come from?

FINN. It is the spear that killed the boar — A thrust behind the shoulder did it. We must send for help.

GRANIA. A great man is dead. Ah, why did I send him to you, Finn?
I thought that two who were so great should be friends.

FINN. The gods chose you, Grania, to give him love and death.

GRANIA. [*Wringing her hands].* Finn, we must mourn him. You have to go against the Lochlanders, and this one that I have taken from you will not be by your side. Before the Fianna go against the Lochlanders they must mourn him, all his comrades must mourn him. *[The hunters begin to come in from the wings].* All the Fianna must mourn him, and the shepherds of his valley. *[She goes towards the body of Diarmuid. They make way for her,*

and when she reaches Diarmuid's body a shepherd coming in from the back gives her Diarmuid's shield and his broken spear]. His shield with the flying white heron upon it shall be laid upon his breast and I will lay beside him the Broad Edge that I bade him take instead of this spear I warned him not to take. Where is my father? Where is King Cormac? He shall see that Diarmuid's burning be worthy of him. *[Enter King Cormac].* Here is my father *[She goes to her father].* Father, he is dead, one of the great men of Eri is dead. I am telling all these people that you will see to his burning that it may be worthy of him.

CORMAC. My daughter has lost a husband and Eri a defender. The Fianna must mourn him, and all the shepherds of this valley. Finn son of Cool, you too shall watch over this mourning.

[Finn goes over and stands by her].

GRANIA. There are birch trees upon the mountain that the summer has made ready for the flame. Every shepherd shall bring a tree and they shall be heaped to a great height. Diarmuid shall be laid upon them and when they are lighted all people that are on the western shore shall see the blaze.

CAOELTE. I will send messengers to gather the swift runners, and the swift riders, and the boxers, and the throwers of the weight, that the funeral games be worthy of him.

USHEEN. I shall send messengers who will gather the harpers and gather the women that his funeral songs may be well sung. Many queens shall mourn him to the sound of harps, for when he lived there was none that would not have taken Grania's place, and wandered with him in her stead. It may be that he will come with

Aonghus out of the heart of some hill and stand invisible among us and know that he is not forgotten.

FINN. The best of my horses shall be killed with his own horse that he may have noble horses when he awakes. *[Turning to the men who have brought in the litter].* Carry him gently for he was well beloved when alive. *[They lay Diarmuid's body upon the litter. Finn turns to Grania].* Lay his shield upon his breast.
[Grania walks again to the body and lays the shield upon Diarmuid. The men lift the litter and carry it slowly to the wood].

CORMAC. Diarmuid is dead, but the Fianna are united and the Lochlanders shall be driven into the sea.

[Finn, Cormac, and Grania go up the stage, following the procession. Conan remains warming his shins by the fire].

CONAN. Grania makes great mourning for Diarmuid, but her welcome to Finn shall be greater.

Curtain

Where There Is Nothing

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Paul Ruttledge, a Country Gentleman.
Thomas Ruttledge, his Brother.
Mrs. Thomas Ruttledge.

Magistrates:
Mr. Dowler
Mr. Algie,
Magistrates
Colonel Lawley
Mr. Joyce
Mr. Green, a Stipendiary Magistrate.

Tinkers:
Sabina Silver,
Molly the Scold,
Charlie Ward,
Paddy Cockfight,
Tommy the Song,
Johneen, etc.

Friars:
Father Jerome
Father Aloysius
Father Colman
Father Bartley

Other Friars, and a crowd of countrymen.

ACT I.

Scene: *A lawn with croquet hoops, garden chairs and tables. Door into house at left. Gate through hedge at back. The hedge is clipped into shapes of farmyard fowl.* Paul Ruttledge *is clipping at the hedge in front. A table with toys on it.*

Thomas Ruttledge. [*Coming out on steps.*] Paul, are you coming in to lunch?

Paul Ruttledge. No; you can entertain these people very well. They are your friends: you understand them.

Thomas Ruttledge. You might as well come in. You have been clipping at that old hedge long enough.

Paul Ruttledge. You needn't worry about me. I should be bored if I went in, and I don't want to be bored more than is necessary.

Thomas Ruttledge. What is that creature you are clipping at now? I can't make it out.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, it is a Cochin China fowl, an image of some of our neighbours, like the others.

Thomas Ruttledge. I don't see any likeness to anyone.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, yes there is, if you could see their minds instead of their bodies. That comb now — —

Mrs. Ruttledge. [*Coming out on steps.*] Thomas, are you coming in?

Thomas Ruttledge. Yes, I'm coming; but Paul won't come.

[Thomas Ruttledge *goes out.*

Mrs. Ruttledge. Oh! this is nonsense, Paul; you must come. All these men will think it so strange if you don't. It is nonsense to think you will be bored. Mr. Green is talking in the most interesting way.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! I know Green's conversation very well.

Mrs. Ruttledge. And Mr. Joyce, your old guardian. Thomas says he was always so welcome in your father's time, he will think it so queer.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! I know all their virtues. There's Dowler, who puts away thousands a year in Consols, and Algie, who tells everybody all about it. Have I forgotten anybody? Oh, yes! Colonel Lawley, who used to lift me up by the ears, when I was a child, to see Africa. No, Georgina, I know all their virtues, but I'm not coming in.

Mrs. Ruttledge. I can't imagine why you won't come in and be sociable.

Paul Ruttledge. You see I can't. I have something to do here. I have to finish this comb. You see it is a beautiful comb; but the wings are very short. The poor creature can't fly.

Mrs. Ruttledge. But can't you finish that after lunch?

Paul Ruttledge. No, I have sworn.

Mrs. Ruttledge. Well, I am sorry. You are always doing uncomfortable things. I must go in to the others. I wish you would have come. [*She goes in.*

Jerome. [*Who has come to gate as she disappears.*] Paul, you there! that is lucky. I was just going to ask for you.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Flinging clipper away, and jumping up.*] Oh, Father Jerome, I am delighted to see you. I haven't seen you for ever so long. Come and have a talk; or will you have some lunch?

Jerome. No, thank you; I will stay a minute, but I won't go in.

Paul Ruttledge. That is just as well, for you would be bored to death. There has been a meeting of magistrates in the village, and my brother has brought them all in to lunch.

Jerome. I am collecting for the Monastery, and my donkey has gone lame; I have had to put it up in the village. I thought you might be able to lend me one to go on with.

Paul Ruttledge. Of course, I'm delighted to lend you that or anything else. I'll go round to the yard with you and order it. But sit down here first. What have you been doing all this time?

Jerome. Oh, we have been very busy. You know we are going to put up new buildings.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Absent-mindedly.*] No, I didn't know that.

Jerome. Yes, our school is increasing so much we are getting a grant for technical instruction. Some of the Fathers are learning handicrafts. Father Aloysius is going to study industries in France; but we are all busy. We are changing with the times, we are beginning to do useful things.

Paul Ruttledge. Useful things. I wonder what you have begun to call useful things. Do you see those marks over there on the grass?

Jerome. What marks?

Paul Ruttledge. Those marks over there, those little marks of scratching.

Jerome. [*Going over to the place* Paul Ruttledge *has pointed out.*] I don't see anything.

Paul Ruttledge. You are getting blind, Jerome. Can't you see that the poultry have been scratching there?

Jerome. No, the grass is perfectly smooth.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, the marks are there, whether you see them or not; for Mr. Green and Mr. Dowler and Mr. Algie and the rest of them run out of their houses when nobody is looking, in their real shapes, shapes like those on my hedge. And then they begin to scratch, they scratch all together, they don't dig but they scratch, and all the time their mouths keep going like that.

[*He holds out his hand and opens and shuts his fingers like a bird's bill.*

Jerome. Oh, Paul, you are making fun of me.

Paul Ruttledge. Of course I am only talking in parables. I think all the people I meet are like farmyard creatures, they have forgotten their freedom, their human bodies are a disguise, a pretence they keep up to deceive one another.

Jerome. [*Sitting down.*] What is wrong with you?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, nothing of course. You see how happy I am. I have a good house and a good property, and my brother and his charming wife have come to look after me. You see the toys of their children here and everywhere. What should be wrong with me?

Jerome. I know you too well not to see that there is something wrong with you.

Paul Ruttledge. There is nothing except that I have been thinking a good deal lately.

Jerome. Perhaps your old dreams or visions or whatever they were have come back. They always made you restless. You ought to see more of your neighbours.

Paul Ruttledge. There's nothing interesting but human nature, and that's in the single soul, but these neighbours of mine they think in flocks and roosts.

Jerome. You are too hard on them. They are busy men, they hav'n't much time for thought, I daresay.

Paul Ruttledge. That's what I complain of. When I hear these people talking I always hear some organized or vested interest chirp or quack, as it does in the newspapers. Algie chirps. Even you, Jerome, though I have not found your armorial beast, are getting a little monastic; when I have found it I will put it among the others. There is a place for it there, but the worst of it is that it will take so long getting nice and green.

Jerome. I don't know what creature you could make for me.

Paul Ruttledge. I am not sure yet; I think it might be a pigeon, something cooing and gentle, and always coming home to the dovecot; not to the wild woods but to the dovecot.

Jerome. I wonder what creature you yourself are like.

Paul Ruttledge. I daresay I am like some creature or other, for very few of us are altogether men; but if I am, I would like to be one of the wild sort. You are right about my dreams. They have been coming back lately. Do you remember those strange ones I had at college?

Jerome. Those visions of pulling something down?

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, they have come back to me lately. Sometimes I dream I am pulling down my own house, and sometimes it is the whole world that I am pulling down. [*Standing up.*] I would like to have great iron claws, and to put them about the pillars, and to pull and pull till everything fell into pieces.

Jerome. I don't see what good that would do you.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, yes it would. When everything was pulled down we would have more room to get drunk in, to drink contentedly out of the cup of life, out of the drunken cup of life.

Jerome. That is a terribly wild thought. I hope you don't believe all you say.

Paul Ruttledge. Perhaps not. I only know that I want to upset everything about me. Have you not noticed that it is a complaint many of us have in this country? and whether it comes from love or hate I don't know, they are so mixed together here.

Jerome. I wish you would come and talk to our Superior. He has a perfect gift for giving advice.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, we'll go to the yard now. [*He gets up.*

Jerome. I have often thought you would come to the Monastery yourself in the end. You were so much the most pious of us all at school. You would be happy in a Monastery. Something is always happening there.

Paul Ruttledge. [*As they go up the garden.*] I daresay, I daresay; but I am not even sure that I am a Christian.

Jerome. Well, anyway, I wish that you would come and talk to our Superior. [*They go out.*

Charlie Ward *and* Boy *enter by the path beyond the hedge and stand at gate.*

Charlie Ward. No use going up there, Johneen, it's too grand a place, it's a dog they might let loose on us. But I'll tell you what, just slip round to the back door and ask do they want any cans mended.

Johneen. Let you take the rabbit then we're after taking out of the snare. I can't bring it round with me.

Charlie Ward. Faith, you can't. They think as bad of us taking a rabbit that was fed and minded by God as if it was of their own rearing; give it here to me. It's hardly it will go in my pocket, it's as big as a hare. It's next my skin I'll have to put it, or it might be noticed on me. [*Boy goes out.*

[Charlie Ward *is struggling to put rabbit inside his coat when* Paul Ruttledge *comes back.*

Paul Ruttledge. Is there anything I can do for you? Do you want to come in?

Charlie Ward. I'm a tinker by trade, your honour. I wonder is there e'er a tin can the maids in the house might want mended or any chairs to be bottomed?

Paul Ruttledge. A tinker; where do you live?

Charlie Ward. Faith, I don't stop long in any place. I go about like the crows; picking up my way of living like themselves.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Opening gate.*] Come inside here. [Charlie Ward *hesitates.*] Come in, you are welcome.

[*Puts his hand on his shoulder.* Charlie Ward *tries to close his shirt over rabbit.*

Paul Ruttledge. Ah, you have a rabbit there. The keeper told me he had come across some snares in my woods.

Charlie Ward. If he did, sir, it was no snare of mine he found. This is a rabbit I bought in the town of Garreen early this morning. Sixpence I was made give for it, and to mend a tin can along with that.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Touching rabbit.*] It's warm still, however. But the day is hot. Never mind; you are quite welcome to it. I daresay you will have a

cheery meal of it by the roadside; my dinners are often tiresome enough. I often wish I could change — look here, will you change clothes with me?

Charlie Ward. Faith, I'd swap soon enough if you weren't humbugging me. It's I that would look well with that suit on me! The peelers would all be touching their caps to me. You'd see them running out for me to sign summonses for them.

Paul Ruttledge. But I am not humbugging. I am in earnest.

Charlie Ward. In earnest! Then when I go back I'll commit Paddy Cockfight to prison for hitting me yesterday.

Paul Ruttledge. You don't believe me, but I will explain. I'm dead sick of this life; I want to get away; I want to escape — as you say, to pick up my living like the crows for a while.

Charlie Ward. To make your escape. Oh! that's different. [*Coming closer.*] But what is it you did? You don't look like one that would be in trouble. But sometimes a gentleman gets a bit wild when he has a drop taken.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, never mind. I will explain better while we are changing. Come over here to the potting shed. Make haste, those magistrates will be coming out.

Charlie Ward. The magistrates! Are they after you? Hurry on, then! Faith, they won't know you with this coat. [*Looking at his rags.*] It's a pity I didn't put on my old one coming out this morning.

[*They go out through the garden.* Thomas Ruttledge *comes down steps from house with* Colonel Lawley *and* Mr. Green.

Mr. Green. Yes, they have made me President of the County Horticultural Society. My speech was quite a success; it was punctuated with applause. I said I looked upon the appointment not as a tribute to my own merits, but to their public spirit and to the Society, which I assured them had come to stay.

Colonel Lawley. What has become of Paul and Father Jerome? I thought I heard their voices out here, and now they are conspicuous by their absence.

Thomas Ruttledge. He seems to have no friend he cares for but that Father Jerome.

Mr. Green. I wish he would come more into touch with his fellows.

Colonel Lawley. What a pity he didn't go into the army. I wish he would join the militia. Every man should try to find some useful sphere of employment.

Mr. Green. Thomas, your brother will never come to see me, though I often ask him. He would find the best people — people worth meeting — at my house. I wonder if he would join the Horticultural Society? I know I voice the sentiments of all the members in saying this. I spoke to a number of them at the function the other day.

Thomas Ruttledge. I wish he would join something. Joyce wants him to join the Masonic Lodge. It is not a right life for him to keep hanging about the place and doing nothing.

Mr. Green. He won't even come and sit on the Bench. It's not fair to leave so much of the work to me. I ought to get all the support possible from local men.

[Mrs. Ruttledge *comes down steps with* Mr. Dowler, Mr. Algie, *and* Mr. Joyce. *She is walking in front.*

Mrs. Ruttledge. [*To* Thomas Ruttledge.] Oh! Thomas, isn't it too bad, Paul has lent the donkey to that friar. I wanted Mr. Joyce to see the children in their panniers. Do speak to him about it.

Thomas Ruttledge. Well, the donkey belongs to him, and for the matter of that so does the house and the place. It would be rather hard on him not to be able to use things as he likes.

Mr. Algie. What a pleasure it must be to Paul to have you and the little ones living here. He certainly owes you a debt of gratitude. Man was not born to live alone.

Mrs. Ruttledge. Well, I think we have done him good. He hasn't done anything for years, except mope about the house and cut the bushes into those absurd shapes, and now we are trying to make him live more like other people.

Colonel Lawley. He was always inclined to be a bit of a faddist.

Mrs. Ruttledge. [*To* Mr. Algie.] Do let me give you a lesson in croquet. I have learned all the new rules. [*To* Mr. Joyce.] Please bring me that basket of balls. [*To* Colonel Lawley.] Will you bring me the mallets? Yes, I am afraid he is a faddist. We have done our best for him, but he ought to be more with men.

Mr. Algie. Yes, Mr. Dowler was just saying he ought to try and be made a director of the new railway.

Colonel Lawley. The militia — the militia.

Mr. Joyce. It's a great help to a man to belong to a Masonic Lodge.

Mr. Green. The Horticultural Society is in want of new members.

Mrs. Ruttledge. Well, I wish he would join something.

Enter Paul Ruttledge *in tinker's clothes, carrying a rabbit in his hand.* Charlie Ward *follows in* Paul's *clothes. All stand aghast.*

Mr. Joyce. Good God!

[*Drops basket.* Colonel Lawley, *who has mallets in his hand, at sight of* Paul Ruttledge *drops them, and stands still.*

Mrs. Ruttledge. Paul! are you out of your mind?

Thomas Ruttledge. For goodness' sake, Paul, don't make such a fool of yourself.

Mrs. Ruttledge. What on earth has happened, and who on earth is that man?

Paul Ruttledge. [*Opens gate for tinker. To* Charlie Ward.] Wait for me, my friend, down there by the cross-road.

[Charlie Ward *goes out.*

Mr. Green. Has he stolen your clothes?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! it's all right; I have changed clothes with him. I am going to join the tinkers.

All. To join the tinkers!

Paul Ruttledge. Life is getting too monotonous; I would give it a little variety. [*To* Mr. Green.] As you would say, it has been running in grooves.

Mr. Joyce. [*To* Mrs. Ruttledge.] This is only his humbugging talk; he never believes what he says.

[Paul Ruttledge *goes towards the steps.*

Mrs. Ruttledge. Surely you are not going into the house with those clothes?

Paul Ruttledge. You are quite right. Thomas will go in for me. [*To* Thomas Ruttledge.] Just go to my study, will you, and bring me my despatch-box; I want something from it before I go.

Thomas Ruttledge. Where are you going to? I wish you would tell me what you are at.

Paul Ruttledge. The despatch-box is on the top of the bureau.

[Thomas Ruttledge *goes out.*

Mr. Joyce. What does all this mean?

Paul Ruttledge. I will explain. [*Sits down on the edge of iron table.*] Did you never wish to be a witch, and to ride through the air on a white horse?

Mr. Joyce. I can't say I ever did.

Paul Ruttledge. Never? Only think of it — to ride in the darkness under the stars, to make one's horse leap from cloud to cloud, to watch the sea

glittering under one's feet and the mountain tops going by.

Colonel Lawley. But what has this to do with the tinkers?

Paul Ruttledge. As I cannot find a broomstick that will turn itself into a white horse, I am going to turn tinker.

Mr. Dowler. I suppose you have some picturesque idea about these people, but I assure you, you are quite wrong. They are nothing but poachers.

Mr. Algie. They are nothing but thieves.

Mr. Joyce. They are the worst class in the country.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, I know that; they are quite lawless. That is what attracts me to them. I am going to be irresponsible.

Mr. Green. One cannot escape from responsibility by joining a set of vagabonds.

Paul Ruttledge. Vagabonds — that is it. I want to be a vagabond, a wanderer. As I can't leap from cloud to cloud I want to wander from road to road. That little path there by the clipped edge goes up to the highroad. I want to go up that path and to walk along the highroad, and so on and on and on, and to know all kinds of people. Did you ever think that the roads are the only things that are endless; that one can walk on and on and on, and never be stopped by a gate or a wall? They are the serpent of eternity. I wonder they have never been worshipped. What are the stars beside them? They never meet one another. The roads are the only things that are infinite. They are all endless.

Mrs. Ruttledge. But they must stop when they come to the sea?

Paul Ruttledge. Ah! you are always so wise.

Mr. Joyce. Stop talking nonsense, Paul, and throw away those filthy things.

Paul Ruttledge. That would be setting cleanliness before godliness. I have begun the regeneration of my soul.

Mr. Dowler. I don't see what godliness has got to do with it.

Mr. Algie. Nor I either.

Paul Ruttledge. There was a saint who said, "I must rejoice without ceasing, although the world shudder at my joy." He did not think he could save his soul without it. I agree with him, and as I was discontented here, I thought it time to make a change. Like that worthy man, I must be content to shock my friends.

Mr. Dowler. But you had everything here you could want.

Paul Ruttledge. That's just it. You who are so wealthy, you of all people should understand that I want to get rid of all that responsibility, answering letters and so on. It is not worth the trouble of being rich if one has to answer letters. Could you ever understand, Georgina, that one gets tired of many charming things? There are family responsibilities [*to* Mr. Joyce], but I can see that you, who were my guardian, sympathize with me in that.

Mr. Joyce. Indeed I do not.

Mrs. Ruttledge. I should think you could be cheerful without ceasing to be a gentleman.

Paul Ruttledge. You are thinking of my clothes. We must feel at ease with the people we live amongst. I shall feel at ease with the great multitude in these clothes. I am beginning to be a man of the world. I am the beggarman of all the ages — I have a notion Homer wrote something about me.

Mr. Dowler. He is either making fun of us or talking great rot. I can't listen to any more of this nonsense. I can't see why a man with property can't let well alone. Algie are you coming my way?

[*They both go into the house, and come out presently with umbrella and coat.*

Mr. Green. Depend upon it, he's going to write a book. There was a man who made quite a name for himself by sleeping in a casual ward.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! no, I'm not going to write about it; if one writes one can do nothing else. I am going to express myself in life. [*To* Thomas Ruttledge *who has returned with box.*] I hope soon to live by the work of my hands, but every trade has to be learned, and I must take something to start with. [*To* Mrs. Ruttledge.] Do you think you will have any kettles to mend when I come this way again?

[*He has taken box from* Thomas Ruttledge *and unlocked it.*

Thomas Ruttledge. I can't make head or tail of what you are at.

Colonel Lawley. What he is at is fads.

Mr. Green. I don't think his motive is far to seek. He has some idea of going back to the dark ages. Rousseau had some idea of the same kind, but it didn't work.

Paul Ruttledge. Yes; I want to go back to the dark ages.

Mr. Green. Do you want to lose all the world has gained since then?

Paul Ruttledge. What has it gained? I am among those who think that sin and death came into the world the day Newton eat the apple. [*To* Mrs. Ruttledge, *who is going to speak.*] I know you are going to tell me he only saw it fall. Never mind, it is all the same thing.

Mrs. Ruttledge. [*Beginning to cry.*] Oh! he is going mad!

Mr. Joyce. I'm afraid he is really leaving us.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Who has been looking at papers, tearing one or two, etc., takes out a packet of notes, which he puts in his breast.*] I daresay this will last me long enough, Thomas. I am not robbing you of very much. Well, good-bye. [*Pats him gently on the shoulder.*] I mustn't forget the rabbit, it may be my dinner to-night; I wonder who will skin it. Good-bye, Colonel, I think I've astonished you to-day. [*Slaps his shoulder.*] That was too hard, was it? Forgive it, you know I'm a common man now. [*Lifts his hat and goes out of gate. Closes it after him and stands with his hands on it, and speaks with the voice of a common man.*] Go on, live in your poultry-yard. Scratch straw and cluck and cackle at everything that you take for a fox. [*Exit.*

Mr. Joyce. [*Goes to* Mrs. Ruttledge, *who has sat down and is wiping her eyes.*] I am very sorry for this, for his father's sake, but it may be as well in the end. If it comes to the worst, you and Thomas will keep up the family name better than he would have done.

Mr. Dowler. He'll find the poor very different from what he thinks when they pick his pocket.

Colonel Lawley. To think that a magistrate should have such fads!

Mr. Green. I venture to say you will see him here in a very different state of mind in a week.

Mr. Algie. [*Who has been in a brown study.*] He has done for himself in this world and the next. Why, he won't be asked to a single shoot if this is heard of.

Thomas Ruttledge. [*Turning from the gate.*] Here are the children, Georgina. Don't say anything before the nurse.

Mr. Green. Well, I must be off. [*Goes in for stick.*

Mr. Joyce. Just bring me out my coat, Green.

[*They all prepare to go.* Mrs. Ruttledge *has gone to open gate and children come in, one in a perambulator. All gather round them admiringly.*

Mr. Joyce. Have you a kiss for godfather to-day?

Mrs. Ruttledge. The poor darlings! I hope they will never know what has happened.

Colonel Lawley. Thank goodness, they have no nonsense in their heads. We know where we are with them.

Curtain.

ACT II.

Scene: *By the roadside. A wall of unmortared stone in the background. Tinkers' encampment. Men, women, and children standing round.* Paul Ruttledge *standing by a fire.*

Paul Ruttledge. What do you mean by "tinning" the soldering iron?

Charlie Ward. If the face of it is not well tinned it won't lift the solder. Show me here.

[*Takes soldering iron from* Paul Ruttledge's *hand.*

Paul Ruttledge. [*Sitting down and drawing a tin can to him.*] Now, let me see how you mend this hole. It seems easy. I'm sure I will be able to learn it as well as any of you.

[*Two tinkers come and stand over him.*

Charlie Ward. [*Pointing to one of them.*] This, sir, is Tommy the Song. He's the best singer we have, but the divil a much good he is only that. He's a great warrant to snare hares.

Tommy the Song. Is the gentleman going to join us?

Paul Ruttledge. Indeed I am, if you'll let me. There's nothing I'd like better.

Tommy the Song. But are you going to learn the trade?

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, if you'll teach me. I'm sure I'll make a good tinker. Look at that now, see how I've stopped that hole already.

Charlie Ward. [*Taking the can from him and looking at it.*] If every can had a little hole in the middle like that, I think you *would* be able to mend them; but there's the straight hole, and the crooked hole, the round hole, the square hole, the angle hole, the bottom hole, the top hole, the side leak, the open leak, the leak-all-round, but I won't frighten you with the names of them all, only this I will say, that, when you've learned to mend all the leakages in a can — and that should take you a year — you're only in the first day of the tinker's week.

Tommy the Song. Don't believe him. He's only humbugging you. It's not the hardness of the work will daunt you.

Paul Ruttledge. Thank you. I was not believing him at all. I'm quite sure I'll be able to mend any can at the end of a week, but the bottoming of them will take longer. I can see that's not so easy. When will you start to teach me that, Charlie?

Charlie Ward. [*As another tinker comes up.*] Paddy, here's the gentleman I was telling you about. He's going to join us for good and all. [*To* Paul Ruttledge.] Wait till we have time and some quiet place, and he'll show you as good a cockfight as ever you saw. [*A woman comes up.*] This is his wife; Molly the Scold we call her; faith, she is a better fighter than any cock he ever had in a basket; he'd find it hard to shut the lid on her.

Molly the Scold. The gentleman seems foolish. Is he all there?

Paddy Cockfight. Stop your chat, Molly, or I'll hit you a welt.

Charlie Ward. Keep your tongue quiet, Molly. If the gentleman has reasons for keeping out of the way it isn't for us to be questioning him. [*To* Paul

Ruttledge.] Don’t mind her, she’s cross enough, but maybe your own ladies would be cross as well if they saw their young sons dying by the roadside in a little kennel of straw under the ass-cart the way she did; from first to last.

Paul Ruttledge. I suppose you have your troubles like others. But you seem cheerful enough.

Charlie Ward. It isn’t anything to fret about. Some of us go soon, and some travel the roads for their lifetime. What does it matter when we are under the nettles if it was with a short rope or a long one we were hanged?

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, that is the way to take life. What does the length of our rope matter?

Charlie Ward. We haven’t time to be thinking of troubles like people that would be shut up in a house. We have the wide world before us to make our living out of. The people of the whole world are begrudging us our living, and we make it out of them for all that. When they will spread currant cakes and feather beds before us, it will be time for us to sit down and fret.

Tommy the Song. It’s likely you’ll think the life too hard. Would you like to be passing by houses in the night-time, and the fire shining out of them, and you hardly given the loan of a sod to light your pipe, and the rain falling on you?

Paul Ruttledge. Why are the people so much against you?

Tommy the Song. We are not like themselves. It’s little we care about them or they about us. If their saint did curse us itself — —

Charlie Ward. Stop. I won't have you talking about that story here. Why would they think so much of the curse of one saint, and saints so plenty?

Paddy Cockfight. Where's the good of a gentleman being here? He'll be breaking down on the road. It's on the ass-cart he'll be wanting to sit.

Tommy the Song. Indeed, I don't think he'll stand the hardship.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, I'll stand it well enough.

Tommy the Song. You're not like us that were reared to it. You were not born like us with wandering in the heart.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh yes, I have wandering in the heart. I got sick of these lighted rooms you were talking of just now.

Charlie Ward. That might be so. It's the dark is welcome to a man sometimes.

Paul Ruttledge. The dark. Yes, I think that is what I want. [*Stands up.*] The dark, where there is nothing that is anything, and nobody that is anybody; one can be free there, where there is nothing. Well, if you let me stay with you, I don't think you will hear any complaints from me. Charlie Ward, Paddy, and the rest of you, I want you to understand that from this out I am one of yourselves. I'll live as you live and do as you do.

[Johneen *and other children come running in.*

Johneen. I was on the top of the bank and I seen a priest coming down the cross-road with his ass. It's collecting he is. We're going to set ourselves here to beg something from him.

Another Child. [*Breathlessly.*] And he has a whole lot of things on the ass. A whole lot of things up behind him.

Another Child. O boys, O boys, we'll have our dealing trick out of them yet. The best way'll be — — [*He suddenly catches sight of* Paul Ruttledge.] Whist, ye divils ye, don't you see the new gentleman?

Paul Ruttledge. Speak out, boys; don't be afraid of me; I'm one of yourselves now.

Child. Oh! but we were going to — — But I won't tell you. [*To the other* children.] Come away here, and we'll not tell him what we'll do.

Paul Ruttledge. [*To* Charlie Ward.] What are they going to do? They're putting their heads together.

Charlie Ward. They're going to put a bush across the road, and when the friar gets down to pull it out of the way they'll snap what they can off the ass, and away with them.

Paul Ruttledge. And why wouldn't they tell me that? Am I not one of yourselves?

Charlie Ward. Ah! It's likely they'll never trust you.

Paul Ruttledge. But they will soon see that I am one of themselves.

Charlie Ward. No; but that's the very thing, you're not one of ourselves. You were not born on the road, reared on the road, married on the road like us.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, it's too late for me to be reared on the road, but I don't see why I shouldn't marry on the road like you. I certainly would do it if it would make me one of you.

Charlie Ward. It might make you one of us, there's no doubt about that. It's the only thing that would do it.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, find a wife for me.

Charlie Ward. Faith, you haven't far to go to find one. Paddy there will give you over his wife quick enough; he won't make a hard bargain over her.

Paul Ruttledge. But I am in earnest. I want to cut myself off from my old life.

Charlie Ward. Oh! I was forgetting that.

Sabina Silver. [*To* Molly.] I wonder what was it he did? I wonder had he the misfortune to kill anybody?

Charlie Ward. [*Calling* Sabina *over.*] Here's a girl should make a good wife, Sabina Silver her name is. Her father is just dead; he didn't treat her over well.

Sabina Silver. [*Coming over.*] What is it?

Charlie Ward. This gentleman wants to speak to you. I think he's looking out for a wife.

Sabina Silver. [*Hanging her head.*] Don't be humbugging me.

Paul Ruttledge. Indeed he's not, Sabina.

Sabina Silver. You're only joking a poor girl. Sure, what would make you think of me at all?

Paul Ruttledge. Sabina, have you been always on the road with Charlie Ward and the others?

Sabina Silver. I have, indeed.

Paul Ruttledge. And you'd make a good tinker's wife?

Sabina Silver. You're joking me, but I would be a better wife for a tinker than for anyone else.

Paul Ruttledge. Sabina, will you marry me?

Sabina Silver. Oh! but I'd be afraid.

Paul Ruttledge. Why, Sabina?

Sabina Silver. I'd be afraid you'd beat me.

Charlie Ward. You see her father used to beat her. She's afraid of the look of a man now.

Paul Ruttledge. I would not beat you, Sabina. How can you have got such an idea?

Sabina Silver. Will you promise me that you won't beat me? Will you swear it to me?

Paul Ruttledge. Of course I will.

Sabina Silver. [*To* Charlie Ward.] Will you make him swear it? Haven't you a little book in your pack? Bring it out and make him swear to me on it, and you'll be my witness.

Charlie Ward. I think, Sibby, you need not be afraid.

Sabina Silver. What's your name, gentleman?

Paul Ruttledge. My name is Paul. Do you like it?

Sabina Silver. Then I won't marry you, Mr. Paul, till you swear to me upon the book that you will never beat me with any stick that you could call a stick, and that you will never strike a kick on me from behind.

Paul Ruttledge. Charlie, go and bring out that book to satisfy her. Of course I swear that; it is absurd.

[Charlie Ward *brings the book out of his pack.*

Paul Ruttledge. I swear, Sabina, that I will never strike you with any stick of any kind, and that I will never kick you. There, will that do? [*He takes book and kisses it.*

Sabina Silver. I misdoubt you. Kiss the book again. [Paul Ruttledge *kisses it.*

Charlie Ward. That's all right.

A Child. [*Crying from a distance.*] He's coming now, the priest's coming!

Paul Ruttledge. Then the priest will marry us. That comes in very handy.

Charlie Ward. [*Scornfully.*] A priest marry you, indeed he'll do nothing of the kind. I hate priests and friars. It's unlucky to get talking to them at all. You never know what trouble you're in for.

A Child. [*Coming up.*] That's true, indeed. The last time I spoke to a priest it's what he leathered me with a stick; may the divil fly away with him.

Paul Ruttledge. But somebody must marry us.

Charlie Ward. Of course. You'll lep over the tinker's budget the usual way. You'll just marry her by lepping over the budget the same as the rest of us marry.

Paul Ruttledge. That's all I want to know. Please marry me in whatever is your usual way.

Jerome *enters, leading the ass. He carries a pig's cheek, some groceries, a string of onions, etc., on the ass, which still has its nursery trappings. He goes up to* Charlie Ward *thinking he is* Paul Ruttledge.

Jerome. Paul, what are you doing here?

Charlie Ward. [*Turning.*] What do you want?

Jerome. Oh! I'm mistaken. I thought — —

Paul Ruttledge. I am here, Father Jerome, but you're talking to the wrong man.

Jerome. Good God, Paul, what has happened?

Paul Ruttledge. Nothing has happened that need surprise you. Don't you remember what we talked of to-day? You told me I was too much by myself. After you went away I thought I would make a change.

Jerome. But a change like this!

Paul Ruttledge. Why should you find fault with it? I am richer now than I was then. I only lent you that donkey then, now I give him to you.

Jerome. What has brought you among such people as these?

Paul Ruttledge. I find them on the whole better company than the people I left a little while ago. Let me introduce you to — —

Jerome. What can you possibly gain by coming here? Are you going to try and teach them?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! no, I am going to learn from them.

Jerome. What can you learn from them?

Paul Ruttledge. To pick up my living like the crows, and to solder tin cans. Just give me that one I mended a while ago.

[*Holds it out to* Father Jerome.

Jerome. That is all nonsense.

Paul Ruttledge. I am happy. Do not your saints put all opponents to the rout by saying they alone of all mankind are happy?

Jerome. I suppose you will not compare the happiness of these people with the happiness of saints?

Paul Ruttledge. There are all sorts of happiness. Some find their happiness like Thomas à Kempis, with a little book and a little cell.

Paddy Cockfight. I would wonder at anybody that could be happy in a cell.

Paul Ruttledge. These men fight in their way as your saints fought, for their hand is against the world. I want the happiness of men who fight, who are hit and hit back, not the fighting of men in red coats, that formal, soon-finished fighting, but the endless battle, the endless battle. Tell me, Father Jerome, did you ever listen in the middle of the night?

Jerome. Listen for what?

Paul Ruttledge. Did you ever, when the monastery was silent, and the dogs had stopped barking, listen till you heard music?

Jerome. What sort of music do you mean?

Paul Ruttledge. Not the music we hear with these ears [*touching his ears*], but the music of Paradise.

Jerome. Brother Colman once said he heard harps in the night.

Paul Ruttledge. Harps! It was because he was shut in a cell he heard harps, maybe it sounds like harps in a cell. But the music I have heard sometimes is made of the continual clashing of swords. It comes rejoicing from Paradise.

Jerome. These are very wild thoughts.

Tommy the Song. I often heard music in the forths. There is many of us hear it when we lie with our heads on the ground at night.

Jerome. That was not the music of Paradise.

Paul Ruttledge. Why should they not hear that music, although it may not set them praying, but dancing.

Jerome. How can you think you will ever find happiness amongst their devils' mirth?

Paul Ruttledge. I have taken to the roads because there is a wild beast I would overtake, and these people are good snarers of beasts. They can help me.

Charlie Ward. What kind of a wild beast is it you want?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! it's a very terrible wild beast, with iron teeth and brazen claws that can root up spires and towers.

Charlie Ward. It's best not to try and overtake a beast like that, but to cross running water and leave it after you.

Tommy the Song. I heard one coming after me one night; very big and shadowy it was, and I could hear it breathing. But when it came up with me I lifted a hazel rod was in my hand, and it was gone on the moment.

Paul Ruttledge. My wild beast is Laughter, the mightiest of the enemies of God. I will outrun it and make it friendly.

Jerome. That is your old wild talk. Do have some sense and go back to your family.

Paul Ruttledge. I am never going back to them. I am going to live among these people. I will marry among them.

Jerome. That is nonsense; you will soon change your mind.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! no, I won't; I am taking my vows as you made yours when you entered religion. I have chosen my wife; I am going to marry before evening.

Jerome. Thank God, you will have to stop short of that, the Church will never marry you.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! I am not going to ask the help of the Church. But I am to be married by what may be as old a ceremony as yours. What is it I am to do, Charlie?

Charlie Ward. To lep a budget, sir.

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, that is it, the budget is there by the wall.

Jerome. I command you, in the name of the Holy Church and of the teaching you have received from the Church, to leave this folly, this degradation, this sin!

Paul Ruttledge. You forget, Jerome, that I am on the track of the wild beast, and hunters in all ages have been a bad people to preach to. When I have tamed the beast, perhaps I will bring him to your religious house to be baptized.

Jerome. I will not listen to this profanity. [*To* Charlie Ward.] It is you who have put this madness on him as you have stolen his clothes!

Charlie Ward. Stop your chat, ye petticoated preacher.

Paul Ruttledge. I think, Father Jerome, you had better be getting home. This people never gave in to the preaching of S. Patrick.

Paddy Cockfight. I'll send you riding home with your face to the tail of the ass!

Tommy the Song. No, stop till we show you that we can make as good curses as yourself. That you may never be warm in winter or cold in summer time — —

Charlie Ward. That's the chat! Bravo! Let him have it.

Tinkers. Be off! be off out of this!

Molly the Scold. Now curse him, Tommy.

Tommy the Song. A wide hoarseness on you — a high hanging to you on a windy day; that shivering fever may stretch you nine times, and that the curses of the poor may be your best music, and you hiding behind the door. [Jerome *goes out.*

Molly the Scold. And you hiding behind the door, and squeezed between the hinges and the wall.

Other Tinkers. Squeezed between the hinges and the wall. [*They follow* Jerome.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Crying after them.*] Don't harm that gentleman; he is a friend of mine.

[*He goes to the wall, and stands there silently, looking upward.*

Sabina Silver. It was grand talk, indeed: I didn't understand a word of it.

Paul Ruttledge. The crows are beginning to fly home. There is a flock of them high up under that cloud. I wonder where their nests are.

Charlie Ward. A long way off, among those big trees about Tillyra Castle.

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, I remember. I have seen them coming home there on a windy evening, tossing and whirling like the sea. They may have seen what I am looking for, they fly so far. A sailor told me once that he saw a crow three hundred miles from land, but maybe he was a liar.

Charlie Ward. Well, they fly far, anyway.

Paul Ruttledge. They tell one another what they have seen, too. That is why they make so much noise. Maybe their news goes round the world. [*He comes towards the others.*] I think they have seen my wild beast, Laughter. They could tell me if he has a face smoky from the eternal fires, and wings of brass and claws of brass — claws of brass. [*Holds out his hands and moves them like claws.*] Sabina, would you like to see a beast with eyes hard and cold and blue, like sapphires? Would you, Sabina? Well, it's time now for the wedding. So what shall we get for the wedding party? What would you like, Sabina?

Sabina Silver. I don't know.

Paul Ruttledge. What do you say, Charlie? A wedding cake and champagne. How would you like champagne? [Tinkers *begin to return*.

Charlie Ward. It might be middling.

Paul Ruttledge. What would you say to a — —

One of the Boys *runs in carrying a pig's cheek. The rest of the* Tinkers *return with him*.

Boy. I knew I could do it. I told you I'd have my dealing trick out of the priest. I took a hold of this, and Johneen made a snap at the onions.

Paul Ruttledge. And he didn't catch you?

Boy. He'd want to be a lot smarter than he is to do that.

Paul Ruttledge. You are a smart lad, anyway. What do you say we should have for our wedding party?

Boy. Are you rich?

Paul Ruttledge. More or less.

Boy. I seen a whole truck full of cakes and bullseyes in the village below. Could you buy the whole of them?

Charlie Ward. Stop talking nonsense. What we want is porter.

Paul Ruttledge. All right. How many public-houses are there in the village?

Tommy the Song. Twenty-four.

Paul Ruttledge. Is there any place we can have barrels brought to?

Charlie Ward. There's a shed near seems to be empty. We might go there.

Paul Ruttledge. Then go and order as many barrels as we can make use of to be brought there.

Paddy Cockfight. We will; and we'll stop till we've drunk them out.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Taking out money.*] I have more money than will pay for that. Sabina, we'll treat the whole neighbourhood in honour of our wedding. I'll have all the public-houses thrown open, and free drinks going for a week!

Tinkers. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

Charlie Ward. Three cheers more, boys.

All. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

The Boys. Now here's the budget.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Taking* Sabina Silver's *hand.*] Now, Sabina, one, two, three!

Curtain.

ACT III.

Scene: *A large shed. Some sheepskins hanging up. Irons and pots for branding sheep, some pitchforks, etc. Tinkers playing cards,* Paul Ruttledge *sitting on an upturned basket.*

Charlie Ward. Stop that melodeon, now will ye, and we'll have a taste of the cocks. Paul didn't see them yet what they can do. Where's Tommy? Where in the earthly world is Tommy the Song?

Paddy Cockfight. He's over there in the corner.

Charlie Ward. What are you doing there, Tommy?

Tommy the Song. Taking a mouthful of prayers, I am.

Charlie Ward. Praying! did anyone ever hear the like of that? Pull him out of the corner.

[Paddy Cockfight *pulls* Tommy the Song *out of the corner.*

Charlie Ward. What is it you were praying for, I would like to know?

Tommy the Song. I was praying that we might all soon die.

Paddy Cockfight. Die, is it?

Charlie Ward. Is it die and all that porter about? Well! you have done enough praying, go over there and look for the basket. Who was it set him praying, I wonder? I am thinking it is the first prayer he ever said in his life.

Sabina Silver. It's likely it was Paul. He's after talking to him through the length of an hour.

Paul Ruttledge. Maybe it was. Don't mind him. I said just now that when we were all dead and in heaven it would be a sort of drunkenness, a sort of ecstasy. There is a hymn about it, but it is in Latin. "Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est." How splendid is the cup of my drunkenness!

Charlie Ward. Well, that is a great sort of a hymn. I never thought there was a hymn like that, I never did.

Paddy Cockfight. To think, now, there is a hymn like that. I mustn't let it slip out of my mind. How splendid is the cup of my drunkenness, that's it.

Charlie Ward. Have you found that old bird of mine?

Tommy the Song. [*Who has been searching among the baskets.*] Here he is, in the basket and a lot of things over it.

Charlie Ward. Get out that new speckled bird of yours, Paddy, I've been wanting to see how could he play for a week past.

Paul Ruttledge. Where do you get the cocks?

Paddy Cockfight. It was a man below Mullingar owned this one. The day I first seen him I fastened my two eyes on him, he preyed on my mind, and next night, if I didn't go back every foot of nine miles to put him in my bag.

Paul Ruttledge. Do you pay much for a good fighting cock?

Sabina Silver. [*Laughs.*] Do you pay much, Paddy?

Paul Ruttledge. Perhaps you don't pay anything.

Sabina Silver. I think Paddy gets them cheap.

Charlie Ward. He gets them cheaper than another man would, anyhow.

Paddy Cockfight. He's the best cock I ever saw before or since. Believe me, I made no mistake when I pitched on him.

Tommy the Song. I don't care what you think of him. I'll back the red; it's he has the lively eye.

Molly the Scold. Andy Farrell had an old cock, and it bent double like himself, and all the feathers flittered out of it, but I hold you he'd leather both your red and your speckled cock together. I tell ye, boys, that was the cock!

[*Uproarious shouts and yells heard outside.*

Charlie Ward. Those free drinks of yours, Paul, is playing the devil with them. Do you hear them now and every roar out of them? They're putting the cocks astray. [*He takes out a cock.*] Sure they think it's thunder.

Molly the Scold. There's not a man of them outside there now but would be ready to knock down his own brother.

Tommy the Song. He wouldn't know him to knock him down. They're all blind. I never saw the like of it.

Paul Ruttledge. You in here stood it better than that.

Charlie Ward. When those common men drink it's what they fall down. They haven't the heads. They're not like us that have to keep heads and heels on us.

Paddy Cockfight. It's well we kept them out of this, or they'd be lying on the floor now, and there'd be no place for my poor bird to show himself off. Look at him now! Isn't he the beauty! [*Takes out the cock.*

Charlie Ward. Now boys, settle the place, put over those barrels out of that. [*They push barrels into a row at back.*] Paul, you sit on the bin the way you'll get a good view.

[*A loud knock at the door. An authoritative voice outside.*

Voice. Open this door.

Paddy Cockfight. That's Green, the Removable; I know his voice well!

Charlie Ward. Clear away, boys. Back with those cocks. There, throw that sack over the baskets. Quick, will ye!

Colonel Lawley. [*Outside.*] Open this door at once.

Mr. Green. [*Outside.*] I insist on this door being opened.

Molly the Scold. What do they want at all? I wish we didn't come into a place with no back door to it.

Paul Ruttledge. There's nothing to be afraid of. Open the door, Charlie. [Charlie Ward *opens the door.*

Enter Mr. Green, Colonel Lawley, Mr. Dowler, Mr. Joyce, Mr. Algie *and* Thomas Ruttledge.

Paddy Cockfight. All J.P.'s; I have looked at every one of them from the dock!

Mr. Green. Mr. Ruttledge, this is very sad.

Mr. Joyce. This is a disgraceful business, Paul; the whole countryside is demoralized. There is not a man who has come to sensible years who is not drunk.

Mr. Dowler. This is a flagrant violation of all propriety. Society is shaken to its roots. My own servants have been led astray by the free drinks that are being given in the village. My butler, who has been with me for seven years, has not been seen for the last two days.

Paul Ruttledge. I am sure you will echo Mr. Dowler, Algie.

Mr. Algie. Indeed I do. I endorse his sentiments completely. There has not been a stroke of work done for the last week. The hay is lying in ridges where it has been cut, there is not a man to be found to water the cattle. It is impossible to get as much as a horse shod in the village.

Paul Ruttledge. I think you have something to say, Colonel Lawley?

Colonel Lawley. I have undoubtedly. I want to know when law and order are to be re-established. The police have been quite unable to cope with the disorder. Some of them have themselves got drunk. If my advice had been taken the military would have been called in.

Mr. Green. The military are not indispensable on occasions like the present. There are plenty of police coming now. We have wired to Dublin for them, they will be here by the four o'clock train.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Gets down from his bin.*] But you have not told me what you have come here for? Is there anything I can do for you?

Thomas Ruttledge. Won't you come home, Paul? The children have been asking for you, and we don't know what to say.

Mr. Green. We have come to request you to go to the public-houses, to stop the free drinks, to send the people back to their work. As for those tinkers, the law will deal with them when the police arrive.

Thomas Ruttledge. Oh, Paul, why have you upset the place like this?

Paul Ruttledge. Well, I wanted to give a little pleasure to my fellow-creatures.

Mr. Dowler. This seems rather a low form of pleasure.

Paul Ruttledge. I daresay it seems to you a little violent. But the poor have very few hours in which to enjoy themselves; they must take their pleasure raw; they haven't the time to cook it.

Mr. Algie. But drunkenness!

Paul Ruttledge. [*Putting his hand on the shoulders of two of the magistrates.*] Have we not tried sobriety? Do you like it? I found it very dull? [*A yell from outside.*] There is not one of those people outside but thinks that he is a king, that he is riding the wind. There is not one of them that would not hit the world a slap in the face. Some poet has written that exuberance is beauty, and that the roadway of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. But I forgot — you do not read the poets.

Mr. Dowler. What we want to know is, are you going to send the people back to their work?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, work is such a little thing in comparison with experience. Think what it is to them to have their imagination like a blazing tar-barrel for a whole week. Work could never bring them such blessedness as that.

Mr. Dowler. Everyone knows there is no more valuable blessing than work.

Mr. Algie. Idleness is the curse of this country.

Paul Ruttledge. I am prejudiced, for I have always been an idler. Doubtless, the poor must work. It was, no doubt, of them you were speaking. Yet, doesn't the Church say, doesn't it describe heaven as a place where saints and angels only sing and hold branches and wander about hand in hand. That must be changed. We must teach the poor to think work a thing fit for heaven, a blessed thing. I'll tell you what we'll do, Dowler. Will you subscribe, and you, and you, and we'll send lecturers about with magic lanterns showing heaven as it should be, the saints with spades and hammers in their hands and everybody working. The poor might learn to think more of work then. Will you join in that scheme, Dowler?

Mr. Dowler. I think you'd better leave these subjects alone. It is obvious you have cut yourself off from both religion and society.

Mr. Green. The world could not go on without work.

Paul Ruttledge. The world could not go on without work! The world could not go on without work! I must think about it. [*Gets up on bin.*] Why should the world go on? Perhaps the Christian teacher came to bring it to an end.

Let us send messengers everywhere to tell the people to stop working, and then the world may come to an end. He spoke of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Perhaps it would be a good thing to end these one by one.

Colonel Lawley. Come away out of this. He has gone mad.

Paul Ruttledge. Ah! I thought that would scare them.

Mr. Joyce. I wish, Paul, you would come back and live like a Christian.

Paul Ruttledge. Like a Christian?

Mr. Joyce. Come away, there's no use stopping here any longer.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Sternly.*] Wait, I have something to say to that. [*To* Charlie Ward.] Do not let anyone leave this place.

[Tinkers *close together at the door*.

Mr. Green. [*To* Tinkers.] This is nonsense. Let me through.

[Tinker *spreads out his arms before him*.

Paul Ruttledge. You have come into a different kingdom now; the old kingdom of the people of the roads, the houseless people. We call ourselves tinkers, and you are going to put us on our trial if you can. You call yourselves Christians and we will put you on your trial first. I will put the world on its trial, and myself of yesterday. [*To a* Boy.] Run out, Johneen, keep a watch, and tell us when the train is coming. Sabina, that rope; we will set these gentlemen on those barrels. [Tinkers *take hold of them*.

Colonel Lawley. Keep your hands off me, you drunken scoundrel!

[*Strikes at* Charlie Ward, *but* Tinkers *seize his arms behind.*

Paul Ruttledge. Tie all their hands behind them.

Mr. Dowler. We'd better give in, there's no saying how many more of them there are.

Mr. Algie. I'll be quiet, the odds are too great against us.

Mr. Green. The police will soon be here; we may as well stay quietly.

Paddy Cockfight. Here, give it to me, I'll put a good twist in it. Don't be afraid, sir, it's not about your neck I'm putting it — — . There now, sit quiet and easy, and you won't feel it at all.

Paul Ruttledge. Are all their hands tied? Now then, heave them up on to the barrels.

[*Slight scuffle, during which all are put on the barrels in a semicircle.*

Paul Ruttledge. Ah! yes, you are on my barrels now; last time I saw you, you were on your own dunghill. Let me see, is there anyone here who can write?

Charlie Ward. Nobody.

Paul Ruttledge. Never mind, you can keep count on your fingers. The rest must sit down and behave themselves as befits a court. They say they are living like Christians. Let us see.

Thomas Ruttledge. Oh, Paul, don't make such a fool of yourself.

Paul Ruttledge. The point is not wisdom or folly, but the Christian life.

Mr. Dowler. Don't answer him, Thomas. Let us preserve our dignity.

Mr. Algie. Yes, let us keep a dignified attitude — we won't answer these ruffians at all.

Paul Ruttledge. Respect the court! [*Turns to Colonel Lawley.*] You have served your Queen and country in the field, and now you are a colonel of militia.

Colonel Lawley. Well, what is there to be ashamed of in that? Answer me that, now.

Paul Ruttledge. Yet there is an old saying about turning the other cheek, an old saying, a saying so impossible that the world has never been able to get it out of its mind. You have helped to enlist men for the army, I think? Some of them have fought in the late war, and you have even sent some of your own militia there.

Colonel Lawley. If I did I'm proud of it.

Paul Ruttledge. Did they think it was a just war?

Colonel Lawley. That was not their business. They had taken the Queen's pay. They would have disgraced themselves if they had not gone.

Paul Ruttledge. Is it not the doctrine of your Christian Church, of your Catholic Church, that he who fights in an unjust war, knowing it to be unjust, loses his own soul?

Colonel Lawley. I should like to know what would happen to the country if there weren't soldiers to protect it.

Paul Ruttledge. We are not discussing the country, we are discussing the Christian life. Has this gentleman lived the Christian life?

All the Tinkers. He has not!

Paddy Cockfight. His sergeant tried to enlist me, giving me a shilling, and I drunk.

Tommy the Song. [*Singing.*]

She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree,
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

Charlie Ward. Stop your mouth, Tommy. This is not your show. [*To* Paul Ruttledge.] Are you going to put a fine on the Colonel? If so I'd like his cloak.

Paul Ruttledge. Now we'll try Mr. Dowler, the rich man. [*Holds up his fingers in a ring.*] Mr. Dowler, could you go through this?

Mr. Algie. Don't answer him, Dowler; he's going beyond all bounds.

Paul Ruttledge. I was a rich man and I could not, and yet I am something smaller than a camel, and this is something larger than a needle's eye.

Mr. Joyce. Don't answer this profanity.

Charlie Ward. But what about the cloak?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh! go and take it.

[Charlie Ward *goes and takes cloak off the* Colonel.

Colonel Lawley. You drunken rascal, I'll see you in the dock for this.

Mr. Joyce. You're encouraging robbery now.

Paul Ruttledge. Remember the commandment, "Give to him that asketh thee"; and the hard commandment goes even farther, "Him that taketh thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also." [*Holding out his rags.*] Have I not shown you what Mr. Green would call a shining example. Charlie, ask them all for their coats.

Charlie Ward. I will, and their boots, too.

All the Tinkers. [*Uproariously.*] Give me your coat; I'll have your boots, etc.

Mr. Green. Wait till the police come. I'll turn the tables on you; you may all expect hard labour for this.

Paul Ruttledge. [*To the* Tinkers.] Stand back, the trial is not over. Mr. Green, these friends of yours have been convicted of breaking the doctrine they boast of. They do not love their enemies; they do not give to every man that asks of them. Some of them, Mr. Dowler, for instance, lay up treasures upon earth; they ask their goods again of those who have taken them away. But you, Mr. Green, are the worst of all. They break the Law of Christ for their own pleasure, but you take pay for breaking it. When their goods are taken away you condemn the taker; when they are smitten on one cheek you

punish the smiter. You encourage them in their breaking of the Law of Christ.

Tommy the Song. He does, indeed. He gave me two months for snaring rabbits.

Paddy Cockfight. He tried to put a fine on me for a cock I had, and he took five shillings off Molly for hitting a man.

Paul Ruttledge. Your evidence is not wanted. His own words are enough. [*Stretching out his arms.*] Have any of these gentlemen been living the Christian life?

All. They have not.

Johneen. [*Coming in.*] Ye'd best clear off now. I see the train coming in to the station.

Paddy Cockfight. The police will find plenty to do in the village before they come to us; that's one good job.

Paul Ruttledge. One moment. I have done trying the world I have left. You have accused me of upsetting order by my free drinks, and I have showed you that there is a more dreadful fermentation in the Sermon on the Mount than in my beer-barrels. Christ thought it in the irresponsibility of His omnipotence. [*Getting from his bin.*] Charlie, give me that cloak. [*He flings it back.*

Charlie Ward. Aren't you going to punish them anyway?

Paul Ruttledge. No, no, from this out I would punish nobody but myself.

[*Some of the* Tinkers *have gone out*.

Charlie Ward. We'd best be off while we can. Come along, Paul, Sibby's gone.

[*As they go out* Tommy the Song *is singing*,

Down by the sally garden my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her milk-white hand;
She bade me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree,
But I, being young and foolish, with her would not agree.

[*All go out except* Paul Ruttledge.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, good-bye, Thomas; I don't suppose I'll see you again. Use all I have; spend it on your children; I'll never want it. [*To the others.*] Will you come and join us? We will find rags for you all. Perhaps you will give up that dream that is fading from you, and come among the blind, homeless people; put off the threadbare clothes of the Apostles and run naked for awhile. [*Is going out.*

Thomas Ruttledge. You have nothing against me, have you, Paul?

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, yes, I have; a little that I have said against all these, and a worse thing than all, though it is not in the book.

Thomas Ruttledge. What is it?

Paul Ruttledge. [*Looking back from the threshold.*] You have begotten fools.

Curtain.

ACT IV.

Scene 1. — *Great door in the middle of the stage under a stone cross, with flights of steps leading to door. Enter* Charlie Ward, Paddy Cockfight, Tommy The Song, *and* Sabina Silver. *They are supporting* Paul Ruttledge, *who is bent and limping.*

Charlie Ward. We must leave you here. The monks will take you in. We're very sorry, Paul. It's a heartscald to us to leave you and you know that, but what can we do? [*They lead* Paul Ruttledge *to steps.*

Paul Ruttledge. Ah! that was a bad stitch! [*Gasps.*] Take care now; put me down gently.

Sabina Silver. Oh! can't we keep him with us anyway; he'll find no one to care him as well as myself.

Tommy the Song. What way can you care him, Sibby? It's no way to have him lying out on the roadside under guano bags, like ourselves, and the rain coming down on him like it did last night. It's in hospital he'll be for the next month.

Charlie Ward. We'd never leave you if you could even walk. If we have to give you to the monks itself, we'd keep round the place to encourage you, only for the last business. We'll have to put two counties at least between us and Gortmore after what we're after doing.

Paul Ruttledge. Never mind, boys, they'll never insult a tinker again in Gortmore as long as the town's a town.

Charlie Ward. Dear knows! it breaks my heart to think of the fine times we had of it since you joined us. Why the months seemed like days. And all the fine sprees we had together! Now you're gone from us we might as well be jailed at once.

Paddy Cockfight. And how you took to the cocks! I believe you were a better judge than myself. No one but you would ever have fancied that black-winged cock — and he never met his match.

Paul Ruttledge. Ah! well, I'm doubled up now like that old cock of Andy Farrell's.

Paddy Cockfight. No, but you were the best warrant to set a snare that ever I came across.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Sitting down with difficulty on the steps.*] Yes; it was a grand time we had, and I wouldn't take back a day of it; but it's over now, I've hit my ribs against the earth and they're aching.

Sabina Silver. Oh! Paul, Paul, is it to leave you we must? And you never once struck a kick or a blow on me all this time, not even and you in pain with the rheumatism. [*A clock strikes inside.*

Charlie Ward. There's the clock striking. The monks will be getting up. We'd best be off after the others. I hear some noise inside; they'd best not catch us here. I'll stop and pull the bell. Be off with you, boys!

Paul Ruttledge. Good-bye, Sabina. Don't cry! you'll get another husband.

Sabina Silver. I'll never lep the budget with another man; I swear it.

Paul Ruttledge. Good-bye, Paddy. Good-bye, Tommy. My mother Earth will have none of me and I will go look for my father that is in heaven.

Paddy Cockfight. Come along, Sibby.

[*Takes her hand and hurries off.*

Charlie Ward. [*Rings bell.*] Are they sure to let you in, Paul? Have you got your story ready?

Paul Ruttledge. No fear, they won't refuse a sick man. No one knows me but Father Jerome, and he won't tell on me.

Charlie Ward. There's a step inside. I'll cut for it.

[*He goes out. Paul is left sitting on steps.*

Scene 2. — *The crypt under the Monastery church. A small barred window high up in the wall, through which the cold dawn is breaking. Altar in a niche at the back of stage; there are seven unlighted candles on the altar. A little hanging lamp near the altar.* Paul Ruttledge *is lying on the altar steps. Friars are dancing slowly before him in the dim light.* Father Aloysius *is leaning against a pillar.*

Some Friars *come in carrying lanterns.*

First Friar. What are they doing? Dancing?

Second Friar. I told you they were dancing, and you would not believe me.

First Friar. What on earth are they doing it for?

Third Friar. I heard them saying Father Paul told them to do it if they ever found him in a trance again. He told them it was a kind of prayer and would bring joy down out of heaven, and make it easier for him to preach.

Second Friar. How still he is lying; you would nearly think him to be dead.

A Friar. It is just a twelvemonth to-day since he was in a trance like this.

Second Friar. That was the time he gave his great preaching. I can't blame those that went with him, for he all but persuaded me.

First Friar. They think he is going to preach again when he awakes, that's why they are dancing. When he wakes one of them will go and call the others.

Third Friar. We were all in danger when one so pious was led away. It's five years he has been with us now, and no one ever went so quickly from lay brother to novice, and novice to friar.

First Friar. The way he fasted too! The Superior bade me watch him at meal times for fear he should starve himself.

Third Friar. He thought a great deal of Brother Paul then, but he isn't so well pleased with him now.

Second Friar. What is Father Aloysius doing there? standing so quiet and his eyes shut.

Third Friar. He is meditating. Didn't you hear Brother Paul gives meditations of his own.

First Friar. Colman was telling me about that. He gives them a joyful thought to fix their minds on. They must not let their minds stray to anything else. They must follow that single thought and put everything else behind them.

Third Friar. Colman fainted the other day when he was at his meditation. He says it is a great labour to follow one thought always.

Second Friar. What do they do it for?

First Friar. To escape what they call the wandering of nature. They say it was in the trance Brother Paul got the knowledge of it. He says that if a man can only keep his mind on the one high thought he gets out of time into eternity, and learns the truth for itself.

Third Friar. He calls that getting above law and number, and becoming king and priest in one's own house.

Second Friar. A nice state of things it would be if every man was his own priest and his own king.

First Friar. I wonder will he wake soon. I thought I saw him stir just now. Father Aloysius, will he wake soon?

Aloysius. What did you say?

First Friar. Will he wake soon?

Aloysius. Yes, yes, he will wake very soon now.

Second Friar. What are they going to do now; are they going to dance?

Third Friar. He was too patient with him. He would have made short work of any of us if we had gone so far.

First Dancer.

Nam, et si ambulavero in medio umbrae mortis,
Non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.

First Friar. They are singing the twenty-second Psalm. What madness to sing!

Second Dancer.

Virga tua, et baculus tuus,
Ipsa me consolata sunt.

First Dancer.

Parasti in conspectu meo mensam
Adversus eos qui tribulant me.

Second Dancer.

Impinguasti in oleo caput meum;
Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est.

Second Friar. Here is the Superior. There'll be bad work now.

Superior comes in.

Superior. [*Holding up his hand.*] Silence!

[*They stop singing and dancing.*

First Dancer. It's the Superior.

Superior. Stop this blasphemy! Leave the chapel at once! I will deal with you by-and-by. [*Dancing* Friars *go out*.

Jerome. [*Stooping over* Paul.] He has not wakened from the trance yet.

Aloysius. [*Who still remains perfectly motionless.*] Not yet, but he will soon awake — Paul!

Superior. It is hardly worth while being angry with those poor fools whose heads he has turned with his talk. [*Stoops and touches his hand.*] It is quite rigid. I will wait till he is alive again, there is no use wasting words on a dead body.

Jerome. [*Stooping over him.*] His eyes are beginning to quiver. Let me be the first to speak to him. He may say some wild things when he awakes, not knowing who is before him.

Superior. He must not preach. I must have his submission at once.

Jerome. I will do all I can with him. He is most likely to listen to me. I was once his close friend.

Superior. Speak to him if you like, but entire submission is the only thing I will accept. [*To the other* Monks.] Come with me, we will leave Father Jerome here to speak to him. [Superior *and* Friars *go to the door*.] Such desecration, such blasphemy. Remember, Father Jerome, entire submission, and at once. [Superior *and* Friars *go out.*

Jerome. Where are the rest of his friends, Father Aloysius? Bartley and Colman ought to be with him when he is like this.

Aloysius. They are resting, because, when he has given his message, they may never be able to rest again.

Jerome. [*Bending over him.*] My poor Paul, this will wear him out; see how thin he has grown!

Aloysius. He is hard upon his body. He does not care what happens to his body.

Jerome. He was like this when he was a boy; some wild thought would come on him, and he would not know day from night, he would forget even to eat. It is a great pity he was so hard to himself; it is a pity he had not always someone to look after him.

Aloysius. God is taking care of him; what could men like us do for him? We cannot help him, it is he who helps us.

Jerome. [*Going on his knee and taking his hand.*] He is awaking. Help me to lift him up. [*They lift him into a chair.*

Aloysius. I will go and call the others now.

Jerome. Do not let them come for a little time, I must speak to him first.

Aloysius. I cannot keep them away long. One cannot know when the words may be put in his mouth.

[Aloysius *goes out.* Jerome *stands by* Paul Ruttledge, *holding his hand.*

Paul Ruttledge. [*Raising his head.*] Ah, you are there, Jerome. I am glad you are there. I could not get up to drive away the mouse that was eating the wax that dropped from the candles. Have you driven it away?

Jerome. It is not evening now. It is almost morning. You were on your knees praying for a great many hours, and then I think you fainted.

Paul Ruttledge. I don't think I was praying. I was among people, a great many people, and it was very bright — I will remember presently.

Jerome. Do not try to remember. You are tired, you must be weak, you must come and have food and rest.

Paul Ruttledge. I do not think I can rest. I think there is something else I have to do, I forget what it is.

Jerome. I am afraid you are thinking of preaching again. You must not preach. The Superior says you must not. He is very angry; I have never seen him so angry. He will not allow you to preach again.

Paul Ruttledge. Did I ever preach?

Jerome. Yes. It was in the garden you got the trance last time. We found you like this, and we lifted you to the bench under the yew tree, and then you began to speak. You spoke about getting out of the body while still alive, about getting away from law and number. All the friars came to listen to you. We had never heard such preaching before, but it was very like heresy.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Getting up.*] Jerome, Jerome, I remember now where I was. I was in a great round place, and a great crowd of things came round me. I couldn't see them very clearly for a time, but some of them struck me

with their feet, hard feet like hoofs, and soft cat-like feet; and some pecked me, and some bit me, and some clawed me. There were all sorts of beasts and birds as far as I could see.

Jerome. Were they devils, Paul, were they the deadly sins?

Paul Ruttledge. I don't know, but I thought, and I don't know how the thought came to me, that they were the part of mankind that is not human; the part that builds up the things that keep the soul from God.

Jerome. That was a terrible vision.

Paul Ruttledge. I struggled and I struggled with them, and they heaped themselves over me till I was unable to move hand or foot; and that went on for a long, long time.

Jerome. [*Crossing himself.*] God have mercy on us.

Paul Ruttledge. Then suddenly there came a bright light, and all in a minute the beasts were gone, and I saw a great many angels riding upon unicorns, white angels on white unicorns. They stood all round me, and they cried out, "Brother Paul, go and preach; get up and preach, Brother Paul." And then they laughed aloud, and the unicorns trampled the ground as though the world were already falling in pieces.

Jerome. It was only a dream. Come with me. You will forget it when you have had food and rest.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Looking at his arm.*] It was there one of them clawed me; one that looked at me with great heavy eyes.

Jerome. The Superior has been here; try and listen to me. He says you must not preach.

Paul Ruttledge. Great heavy eyes and hard sharp claws.

Jerome. [*Putting his hands on his shoulders.*] You must awake from this. You must remember where you are. You are under rules. You must not break the rules you are under. The brothers will be coming in to hear you, you must not speak to them. The Superior has forbidden it.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Touching* Jerome's *hand.*] I have always been a great trouble to you.

Jerome. You must go and submit to the Superior. Go and make your submission now, for my sake. Think of what I have done for your sake. Remember how I brought you in, and answered for you when you came here. I did not tell about that wild business. I have done penance for that deceit.

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, you have always been good to me, but do not ask me this. I have had other orders.

Jerome. Last time you preached the whole monastery was upset. The Friars began to laugh suddenly in the middle of the night.

Paul Ruttledge. If I have been given certain truths to tell, I must tell them at once before they slip away from me.

Jerome. I cannot understand your ideas; you tell them impossible things. Things that are against the order of nature.

Paul Ruttledge. I have learned that one needs a religion so wholly supernatural, that is so opposed to the order of nature that the world can never capture it.

[*Some* Friars *come in. They carry green branches in their hands.*

Paul Ruttledge. They are coming. Will you stay and listen?

Jerome. I must not stay. I must not listen.

Paul Ruttledge. Help me over to the candles. I am weak, my knees are weak. I shall be strong when the words come. I shall be able to teach. [*He lights a taper at the hanging lamp and tries to light the candles with a shaking hand.* Jerome *takes the taper from him and lights the candles.*] Why are you crying, Jerome?

Jerome. Because we that were friends are separated now. We shall never be together again.

Paul Ruttledge. Never again? The love of God is a very terrible thing.

Jerome. I have done with meddling. I must leave you to authority now. I must tell the Superior you will not obey. [*He goes out.*

First Friar. Father Jerome had a very dark look going out.

Second Friar. He was shut up with the Superior this morning. I wonder what they were talking about.

First Friar. I wonder if the Superior will mind our taking the branches. They are only cut on Palm Sunday other years. What will he tell us, I

wonder? It seems as if he was going to tell us how to do some great thing. Do you think he will teach us to do cures like the friars used at Esker?

Second Friar. Those were great cures they did there, and they were not strange men, but just the same as ourselves. I heard of a man went to them dying on a cart, and he walked twenty miles home to Burren holding the horses head.

First Friar. Maybe we'll be able to see visions the same as were seen at Knock. It's a great wonder all that was seen and all that was done there.

Third Friar. I was there one time, and the whole place was full of crutches that had been thrown away by people that were cured. There was a silver crutch there some rich man from America had sent as an offering after getting his cure. Speak to him, Brother Colman. He seems to be in some sort of a dream. Ask if he is going to speak to us now.

Colman. We are all here, Brother Paul.

Paul Ruttledge. Have you all been through your meditations? [*They all gather round him.*

Bartley. We have all tried; we have done our best; but it is hard to keep our mind on the one thing for long.

Paul Ruttledge. "He ascended into heaven." Have you meditated upon that? Did you reject all earthly images that came into your mind till the light began to gather?

Third Friar. I could not fix my mind well. When I put out one thought others came rushing in.

Colman. When I was meditating, the inside of my head suddenly became all on fire.

Aloysius. While I was meditating I felt a spout of fire going up between my shoulders.

Paul Ruttledge. That is the way it begins. You are ready now to hear the truth. Now I can give you the message that has come to me. Stand here at either side of the altar. Brother Colman, come beside me here. Lay down your palm branches before this altar; you have brought them as a sign that the walls are beginning to be broken up, that we are going back to the joy of the green earth. [*Goes up to the candles and speaks.*] Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est. For a long time after their making men and women wandered here and there, half blind from the drunkenness of Eternity; they had not yet forgotten that the green Earth was the Love of God, and that all Life was the Will of God, and so they wept and laughed and hated according to the impulse of their hearts. [*He takes up the green boughs and presses them to his breast.*] They gathered the green Earth to their breasts and their lips, as I gather these boughs to mine, in what they believed would be an eternal kiss. [*He remains a little while silent.*

Second Friar. I see a light about his head.

Third Friar. I wonder if he has seen God.

Paul Ruttledge. It was then that the temptation began. Not only the Serpent who goes upon his belly, but all the animal spirits that have loved things better than life, came out of their holes and began to whisper. The men and women listened to them, and because when they had lived according to the joyful Will of God in mother wit and natural kindness, they sometimes did

one another an injury, they thought that it would be better to be safe than to be blessèd, they made the Laws. The Laws were the first sin. They were the first mouthful of the apple, the moment man had made them he began to die; we must put out the Laws as I put out this candle.

[*He puts out the candle with an extinguisher, still holding the boughs with his left hand. Two orthodox Friars have come in.*

First Orthodox Friar. You had better go for the Superior.

Second Orthodox Friar. I must stop and listen.

[*The First Orthodox Friar listens for a minute or two and then goes out.*

Paul Ruttledge. And when they had lived amidst the green Earth that is the Love of God, they were sometimes wetted by the rain, and sometimes cold and hungry, and sometimes alone from one another; they thought it would be better to be comfortable than to be blessèd. They began to build big houses and big towns. They grew wealthy and they sat chattering at their doors; and the embrace that was to have been eternal ended, lips and hands were parted. [*He lets the boughs slip out of his arms.*] We must put out the towns as I put out this candle. [*Puts out another candle.*

A Friar. Yes, yes, we must uproot the towns.

Paul Ruttledge. But that is not all, for man created a worse thing, yes, a worse defiance against God. [*The* Friars *groan*.] God put holiness into everything that lives, for everything that desires is full of His Will, and everything that is beautiful is full of His Love; but man grew timid because it had been hard to find his way amongst so much holiness, and though God had made all time holy, man said that only the day on which God rested

from life was holy, and though God had made all places holy, man said, “no place but this place that I put pillars and walls about is holy, this place where I rest from life”; and in this and like ways he built up the Church. We must destroy the Church, we must put it out as I put out this candle. [*Puts out another candle.*

Friars. [*Clasping one another’s hands.*] He is right, he is right. The Church must be destroyed. [*The* Superior *comes in.*

First Friar. Here is the Superior.

A Friar. He has been saying — —

Superior. Hush! I will hear him to the end.

Paul Ruttledge. That is not all. These things may be accomplished and yet nothing be accomplished. The Christian’s business is not reformation but revelation, and the only labours he can put his hand to can never be accomplished in Time. He must so live that all things shall pass away. [*He stands silent for a moment and then cries, lifting his hand above his head.*] Give me wine out of thy pitchers; oh, God, how splendid is my cup of drunkenness. We must become blind, and deaf, and dizzy. We must get rid of everything that is not measureless eternal life. We must put out hope as I put out this candle. [*Puts out a candle.*] And memory as I put out this candle. [*As before.*] And thought, the waster of Life, as I put out this candle. [*As before.*] And at last we must put out the light of the Sun and of the Moon, and all the light of the World and the World itself. [*He now puts out the last candle, the chapel is very dark. The only light is the faint light of morning coming through the window.*] We must destroy the World; we must

destroy everything that has Law and Number, for where there is nothing, there is God.

[*The* Superior *comes forward. One of* Paul's Friars *makes as if to speak to him. The* Superior *strikes at him with the back of his hand.*

Superior. [*To* Paul Ruttledge.] Get out of this, rebel, blasphemous rebel!

Paul Ruttledge. Do as you like to me, but you cannot silence my thoughts. I learned them from Jesus Christ, who made a terrible joy, and sent it to overturn governments, and all settled order.

[Paul's Friars *rush to save him from the* Superior.

Paul Ruttledge. There is no need for violence. I am ready to go.

Colman. [*Taking his hand.*] I will go with you.

Aloysius. I will go with you too.

Several other Friars. And I, and I, and I.

Superior. Whoever goes with this heretic goes straight into the pit.

Bartley. Do not leave us behind you. Let us go with you.

Colman. Teach us! teach us! we will help you to teach others.

Paul Ruttledge. Let me go alone, the one more, the one nearer falsehood.

Bartley. We will go with you! We will go with you! We must go where we can hear your voice.

A Friar. [*Who stands behind the* Superior.] God is making him speak against himself.

Paul Ruttledge. No, the time has not come for you. You would be thinking of your food at midday and listening for the bells at prayer time. You have not yet heard the voices and seen the faces.

Superior. A miracle! God is making the heretic speak against himself. Listen to him!

Aloysius. We will not stay behind, we will go with you.

Bartley. We cannot live without hearing you!

Paul Ruttledge. I am led by hands that are colder than ice and harder than diamonds. They will lead me where there will be hard thoughts of me in the hearts of all that love me, and there will be a fire in my heart that will make it as bare as the wilderness.

Aloysius. We will go with you. We too will take those hands that are colder than ice and harder than diamonds.

Several Monks. We too! we too!

Patrick. Bring us to the hands that are colder than ice and harder than diamonds.

Other Monks. Pull them away! pull them away from him!

[*They are about to seize the Monks who are with* Paul Ruttledge.

Superior. [*Going between them.*] Back! back! I will have no scuffling here. Let the devil take his children if he has a mind to. God will call His own.

[*The* Monks *fall back.* Superior *goes up to altar, takes the cross from it and turns, standing on the steps.*

Superior. Father Aloysius, come to me here. [Aloysius *takes* Paul Ruttledge's *hand.*] Father Bartley, Father Colman. [*They go nearer to* Paul Ruttledge.] Father Patrick! [*A* Friar *comes towards him.*] Kneel down! [Father Patrick *kneels.*] Father Clement, Father Nestor, Father James ... leave the heretic — you are on the very edge of the pit. Your shoes are growing red hot.

A Friar. I am afraid, I am afraid. [*He kneels.*

Superior. Kneel down; return to your God. [*Several* Monks *kneel.*

Colman. They have deserted us.

Paul Ruttledge. Many will forsake the truth before the world is pulled down. [*Stretching out his arms over his head.*] I pulled down my own house, now I go out to pull down the world.

Superior. Strip off those holy habits.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Taking off his habit.*] One by one I am plucking off the rags and tatters of the world.

ACT V.

Scene: *Smooth level grass near the Shannon. Ecclesiastical ruins, a part of which have been roofed in. Rocky plain in the distance, with a river.* Father Colman *sorting some bundles of osiers.*

Aloysius *enters with an empty bag.*

Colman. You are the first to come back Aloysius. Where is Brother Bartley?

Aloysius. He parted from me at the cross roads and went on to preach at Shanaglish. He should soon be back now.

Colman. Have you anything in the bag?

Aloysius. Nothing. [*Throws the bag down.*] It doesn't seem as if our luck was growing. We have but food enough to last till to-morrow. We have hardly that. The rats from the river got at the few potatoes I gathered from the farmers at Lisheen last week, in the corner where they were.

Colman. This is the first day you got nothing at all. Maybe you didn't ask the right way.

Aloysius. I asked for alms for the sake of the love of God. But the first place where I asked it, the man of the house was giving me a handful of meal, and the woman came and called out that we were serving the devil in the name of God, and she drove me from the door.

Colman. It is since the priests preached against us they say that. Did you go on to Lisheen. They used always to treat us well there.

Aloysius. I did, but I got on no better there.

Colman. That is a wonder, after the woman that had the jaundice being cured with prayers by Brother Paul.

Aloysius. That's just it. If he did cure her, they say the two best of her husband's bullocks died of the blackwater the next day, and he was no way thankful to us after that.

Colman. Did you try the houses along the bog road?

Aloysius. I did, and the children coming back from school called out after me and asked who was it did away with the widow Cloran's cow.

Colman. The widow Cloran's cow?

Aloysius. That was the cow that died after grazing in the ruins here.

Colman. If it did, it was because of an old boot it picked up and ate, and that never belonged to us.

Aloysius. I wish we had something ourselves to eat. They should be sitting down to their dinner in the monastery now. They will be having a good dinner to-day to carry them over the fast to-morrow.

Colman. I am thinking sometimes, Brother Paul should give more thought to us than he does. It is all very well for him, he is so taken up with his thoughts and his visions he doesn't know if he is full or fasting.

Aloysius. He has such holy thoughts and visions no one would like to trouble him. He ought not to be in the world at all, or to do the world's work.

Colman. So long as he is in the world, he must give some thought to it. There must be something wrong in the way he is doing things now. I thought he would have had half Ireland with him by this time with his great preaching, but someway when he preaches to the people, they don't seem to mind him much.

Aloysius. He is too far above them; they have not education to understand him.

Colman. They understand me well enough when I give my mind to it. But it is harder to preach now than it was in the monastery. We had something to offer then; absolution here, and heaven after.

Aloysius. Isn't it enough for them to hear that the kingdom of heaven is within them, and that if they do the right meditations — —

Colman. What can poor people that have their own troubles on them get from a few words like that they hear at a cross road or a market, and the wind maybe blowing them away? If we could gather them together now.... Look, Aloysius, at these sally rods; I have a plan in my mind about them.

[*He has stuck some of the rods in the ground, and begins weaving others through them.*

Aloysius. Are you going to make baskets like you did in the monastery schools?

Colman. We must make something if we are to live. But it is more than that I was thinking of; we might coax some of the youngsters to come and learn the basket making; it would make them take to us better if we could put them in the way of earning a few pence.

Aloysius. [*Taking up some of the osiers and beginning to twist them.*] That might be a good way to come at them; they could work through the day, and at evening we could tell them how to repeat the words till the light comes inside their heads. But would Paul think well of it? He is more for pulling down than building up.

Colman. When I explain it to him I am sure he will think well of it; he can't go on for ever without anyone to listen to him.

Aloysius. I suppose not, and with no way of living. But I don't know, I'm afraid he won't like it.

Colman. Hush! Here he is coming.

Aloysius. If one had a plan now for doing some destruction — —

Colman. Hush! don't you see there is somebody with him.

Paul Ruttledge *comes in with* Charlie Ward.

Paul Ruttledge. This is Charlie Ward, my old friend.

Aloysius. The Charlie Ward you lived on the roads with?

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, when I went looking for the favour of my hard mother, Earth, he helped me. He is her good child and she loves him.

Colman. He is welcome. How did he find you out?

Paul Ruttledge. I don't know. How did you find me out, Charlie?

Charlie Ward. Oh, I didn't lose sight of you so much as you thought. I had to stop away from Gortmore a good while after we left you at the gate, but I sent Paddy Cockfight one time to get news, and he mended cans for the laundry of the monastery, and they told him you were well again, and a monk as good as the rest. But a while ago I got word there was a monk had gone near to break up the whole monastery with his talk and his piety, and I said to myself, "That's Paul!" And then I heard there was a monk had been driven out for not keeping the rules, and I said to myself, "That's Paul!" And the other day when what's left of us came to Athlone, I heard talk of some disfrocked monks that were upsetting the whole neighbourhood, and I said, "That's Paul." To Sabina Silver I said that. "That merry chap Paul," I said.

Paul Ruttledge. I'm afraid you have a very bad opinion of me, Charlie. Well, maybe I earned it.

Aloysius. You cannot know much of him if you have a bad opinion of him. He will be made a saint some day.

Charlie Ward. He will, if there's such a thing as a saint of mischief.

Paul Ruttledge. A saint of mischief? Well, why not that as well as another? He would upset all the beehives, he would throw them into the market-place. Sit down now, Charlie, and eat a bit with us.

Colman. You are welcome, indeed, to all we can give you, but we have not a bit of food that is worth offering you. Aloysius got nothing at all in the villages to-day, Brother Paul. The people are getting cross.

Paul Ruttledge. Well, sit down, anyway. The country people liked me well enough once, there was no man they liked so much as myself when I gave them drink for nothing. Didn't they, Charlie?

Charlie Ward. Oh, that was a great time. They were lying thick about the roads. I'll be thinking of it to my dying day.

Paul Ruttledge. I have given them another kind of drink now.

Charlie Ward. What sort of a drink is that?

Paul Ruttledge. We have rolled a great barrel out of a cellar that is under the earth. We have rolled it right into the midst of them. [*He moves his hand about as if he were moving a barrel.*] It's heavy, and when they have drunk what is in it, I would like to see the man that would be their master.

Charlie Ward. That would be a great drink, but I wouldn't be sure that you're in earnest.

Paul Ruttledge. Colman and Aloysius will tell you all about it. It was made in a good still, the barley was grown in a field that's down under the earth.

Charlie Ward. That's likely enough. I often heard of places like that.

Paul Ruttledge. And when they have drunk from my barrel, they will break open the door, they will put law and number under their two feet; and they will have a hot palm and a cold palm, for they will put down the moon and the sun with their two hands.

Charlie Ward. There's no mistake but you're the same Paul still; nice and plain and simple, only for your hard talk. And what about the rheumatism?

It’s hardly you got through that fit you had, and you don’t look as if much hardship would agree with you now.

Aloysius. He does not, indeed, and if he doesn’t kill himself one way he will another. Wait now till I tell you the way he is living. I don’t think he tasted bit or sup to-day, and all he had last night was a couple of dry potatoes.

Charlie Ward. Is that so? [*Takes* Paul Ruttledge’s *arm.*] You haven’t much more flesh on you than a crane in moonlight. They don’t seem to have much notion of minding you here, you that were reared soft. It would be better for you to come back to us; bad as our lodging is, there’d be a bit in the pot for you and Sabina to care you. It’s she would give you a good welcome.

Colman. [*Starting up.*] We can mind him well enough here. I have a plan. We haven’t been getting on the way we ought with the people. It’s no way to be getting on with people to be asking things of them always, they have no opinion at all of us seeing us the way we are. They have no notion of the respect they should show to Brother Paul, and the way all the Brothers used to be listening to his preaching, and the townspeople as well. And I, myself, the time I preached in Dublin — —

Aloysius. Yes, indeed, Paul, think of the great crowds used to come when you preached in the Abbey church, and all the money that was gathered that time of the Mission.

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, I used to like once to see all the faces looking up at me. But now all that is gone from me. Now I think it is enough to be a witness for the truth, and to think the thoughts I like. God will bring the

people to me. He will make of my silence a great wind that will shatter the ships of the world.

Colman. That is all very well, but the people are not coming.

Aloysius. And more than that, they are driving us away from their doors now, Paul.

Charlie Ward. The way they do to us. But Paul was not born on the roads. [*Lights his pipe.*

Colman. It's no use stopping waiting for a wind; if we have anything to say that's worth the people listening to, we must bring them to hear it one way or another. Now, it is what I was saying to Aloysius, we must begin teaching them to make things, they never had the chance of any instruction of the sort here.

Paul Ruttledge. To make things? This sort of things? [*Takes the half-made basket from* Colman.

Colman. Those and other things, we got a good training in the old days. And we'll get a grant from the Technical Board. The Board pays up to four hundred pounds to some of its instructors.

Paul Ruttledge. And then?

Aloysius. Oh, then we'll sell all the things we make. I'm sure we'll get a market for them.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, I understand; you will sell them. And what about the dividing of the money? You will need to make laws about that.

Colman. Of course; we will have to make rules, and to pay according to work.

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, we will grow quite rich in time. What are we to do then? we can't go on living in this ruin?

Colman. Of course not. We'll build workshops and houses for those who come to work from a distance, good houses, slated, not thatched.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Turning to* Aloysius *and* Charlie Ward.] Yes, you see his plan. To gather the people together, to build houses for them; to make them rich too, and to keep their money safe. And the Kingdom of God too? What about that?

Colman. Oh, I'm just coming to that. They will think so much more of our teaching when we have got them under our influence by other things. Of course we will teach them their meditations, and give them a regular religious life. We must settle out some little place for them to pray in — there's a high gable over there where we could hang a bell — —

Paul Ruttledge. Oh yes, I understand. You would weave them together like this [*weaves the osiers in and out*], you would add one thing to another, laws and money and church and bells, till you had got everything back again that you have escaped from. But it is my business to tear things asunder like this [*tears pieces from the basket*], and this, and this — —

Aloysius. I told him you'd never agree to it. He ought to have known that himself.

Colman. We must have something to offer the people.

Paul Ruttledge. You say that because you got nothing to-day. Aloysius has got nothing in his sack. [*Taking sack and turning it upside down.*] It is quite empty. Every religious teacher before me has offered something to his followers, but I offer them nothing. [*Plunging his arm down into the sack.*] My sack is quite empty. I will never dip my hand into nature's full sack of illusions; I am tired of that old conjuring bag. [*He walks up and down muttering.*

Charlie Ward. [*To* Colman.] You may as well give up trying to settle him down to anything. He was a tinker once, and he'll be a tinker always; he has got the wandering into his blood. Will you come back to the roads, Paul, to your old friends and to Sabina?

Paul Ruttledge. [*Sitting down beside him.*] Ah, my old friends, they were very kind to me; but these friends too are very kind to me.

Charlie Ward. Well, come and see them anyway; they'll be glad to see you, those that are left of us.

Paul Ruttledge. Those that are left of you? Where are the others?

Charlie Ward. Some are dead, and some are jailed, and some are on the roads here and there. Sabina is with us always, and Johneen is a great hand with the tools now, but Tommy the Song — —

Paul Ruttledge. Oh, Tommy the Song, does he pray still? He was beginning to pray. Did he ever get an answer?

Charlie Ward. Well, I don't know about an answer, but I believe he heard something one night beside an old thorn tree, some sort of a voice it was.

Paul Ruttledge. A voice? What did it say to him? Did he see anything? We have learned too much, our minds are like troubled water — we get nothing but broken images. He who knew nothing may have seen all. Is he praying still?

Charlie Ward. If he is, it's in Galway gaol he's praying, with or without a thorn tree.

Paul Ruttledge. Did he tell no one what the voice said to him?

Charlie Ward. He did not, unless he might have told Johneen or some other one.

Paul Ruttledge. I will go with you and see them. [*Gets up.*

Colman. [*To* Aloysius, *with whom he has been whispering*.] Take care, but if he goes back to his old friends, he'll stop with them and leave us.

Aloysius. [*Putting his hand on* Paul Ruttledge's *arm.*] Don't go, Brother Paul, till I talk to you awhile.

Paul Ruttledge. Do you want me? Well, Charlie, I will stay here, I won't go; but bring all the rest to see me, I want to ask them about that vision.

Charlie Ward. I'll bring one of them, anyway. [*Exit.*

Aloysius. Brother Paul, it is what I am thinking; now the tinkers have come back to you, you could begin to gather a sort of an army; you can't fight your battle without an army. They could call to the other tinkers, and the tramps and the beggars, and the sieve-makers and all the wandering people. It would be a great army.

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, that would be a great army, a great wandering army.

Aloysius. The people would be afraid to refuse us then; we would march on — —

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, we could march on. We could march on the towns, and we could break up all settled order; we could bring back the old joyful, dangerous, individual life. We would have banners, we would each have a banner, banners with angels upon them — we will march upon the world with banners — —

Colman. We would not be in want of food then, we could take all we wanted.

Aloysius. We could take all we wanted, we would be too many to put in gaol; all the people would join us in the end; you would be able to persuade them all, Brother Paul, you would be their leader; we would make great stores of food — —

Paul Ruttledge. We will have one great banner that will go in front, it will take two men to carry it, and on it we will have Laughter, with his iron claws and his wings of brass and his eyes like sapphires — —

Aloysius. That will be the banner for the front, we will have different troops, we will have captains to organize them, to give them orders — —

Paul Ruttledge. [*Standing up.*] To organize? That is to bring in law and number? Organize — organize — that is how all the mischief has been done. I was forgetting, we cannot destroy the world with armies, it is inside our minds that it must be destroyed, it must be consumed in a moment

inside our minds. God will accomplish his last judgment, first in one man's mind and then in another. He is always planning last judgments. And yet it takes a long time, and that is why he laments in the wind and in the reeds and in the cries of the curlews.

Colman. I think we had better go down to the river and see are there any eels on the lines we set. We must find something for supper. It is near sunset; see how the crows are flying home.

Paul Ruttledge. [*Looking up.*] The crows are my darlings! I like their harsh merriment better than those sad cries of the wind and the rushes. Look at them, they are tossing about like witches, tossing about on the wind, drunk with the wind.

Colman. Well, I'll go look at the lines, anyhow. Put turf on the fire, Aloysius; Bartley should soon be home from Shanaglish.

Aloysius. I wonder why he isn't home by this. I'm uneasy till I see him, after the way the people treated me to-day. [*Shades his eyes to look out.*] Here he is! He's running!

Colman. [*Coming over to him.*] He is running hard! He must be in some danger — —

Enter Bartley *out of breath.*

Bartley. Run, run, come away, there's not a minute to lose.

Colman. What is the matter? what has happened?

Bartley. The people are coming up the road! They attacked me in the market! They followed me, they are on the road. I slipped away across the fields. Run, run!

Colman. What is it? What are they going to do to us?

Bartley. You would know that if you saw them! They have stones and sticks. Raging they are, and calling for our lives. They say we brought witchcraft and ill-luck on the place! Come to the boat, it's in the rushes; they won't see us, we'll get to the island. Hurry, hurry! [*He runs out.*

Aloysius. Come, Brother Paul, hurry, hurry!

Paul Ruttledge. I am going to stay.

Bartley. They will kill us if we stay! Brother Colman said they have stones and sticks; I think I hear them!

Paul Ruttledge. You are afraid because you have been shut up so long. I am not afraid because I have lived upon the roads, where one is ready for anything that may happen. One has to learn that, like any other thing. I will stay.

Aloysius. He wants the crown!

Paul Ruttledge. Where is Bartley?

Colman. He is gone. Come, you must go too, we can't leave you here. You have too much to do to throw your life away, we have all too much to do.

Paul Ruttledge. No, no. There is nothing to do; I am going to stay.

Aloysius. I will stay with you. [*Takes his hand.*

Paul Ruttledge. Death is the last adventure, the first perfect joy, for at death the soul comes into possession of itself, and returns to the joy that made it. [*A great shout outside.*

Colman. [*Seizing* Aloysius.] Come, come, Aloysius! come, Paul! We haven't a moment, here they are. [*Drags* Aloysius *away.*

Paul Ruttledge. Good-bye, Aloysius, good-bye, Colman. Keep a pick going at the foundations of the world.

Colman *and* Aloysius *run on.*

One of the Mob outside. They are here in the ruins!

Another Voice. This way! This way!

Paul Ruttledge. I will not go. I have a little reason for staying, but no reason is too little to be the foundation of martyrdom. People have been martyred for all kinds of reasons, and my reason that is not worth a rush will do as well as any other. [*Looks round.*] Ah! they are gone. A little reason, a little reason. I have entered into the second freedom — the irresponsibility of the saints.

Sings.

Parasti in conspectu meo mensam
Adversus eos qui tribulant me.
Impinguasti in oleo caput meum,
Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est.

[People *rush in with sticks uplifted.*

One of the Mob. Where are the heretics?

Another. We'll make an end of their witchcraft!

Another. Here is the worst of them!

Another. Give me back my cattle you put the sickness on!

Another. We'll have no witchcraft here! Drive away the unfrocked priest!

Another. Make an end of him when we have the chance!

Paul Ruttledge. Yes, make an end of me. I have tried hard to live a good life; give me a good death now.

One of the Crowd. Quick, don't give him time to put the evil eye on us!

[*They rush at him. His hands are seen swaying about above the crowd.*

Paul Ruttledge. I go to the invisible heart of flame!

One of the Crowd. Throw him there now! Where are the others?

Another. They must be among the rocks.

Another. They are not; they are gone down the road!

Another. I tell you it's in the rocks they are! It's in the rocks they're hiding!

Another. They are not; they couldn't run in the rocks; they're running down the road.

Several Voices. They're on the road; they're on the road.

[*They all rush out, leaving* Paul Ruttledge *lying on the ground. It grows darker.* Fathers Colman *and* Aloysius *creep up.*

Colman. Paul, Paul, come; we have still time to get to the boat.

Aloysius. Oh! they have killed him; there is a wound in his neck! Oh! he has been the first of us to get the crown!

Colman. There are voices! They must be coming back! Come to the boat, maybe we can bury him to-morrow!

[*They go out.* Paul Ruttledge *half rises and sinks back.*

Enter Charlie Ward *and* Sabina Silver.

Charlie Ward. They have done for him. I thought they would.

Sabina Silver. Oh, Paul, I never thought to find you like this! He's not dead; he'll come round yet.

Charlie Ward. [*Opens his shirt and puts in his hand on his heart.*] Paul!

Paul Ruttledge. Ah! Charlie, give me the soldering iron — no, bring me the lap anvil — I'm as good a tinker as any of you.

Charlie Ward. He thinks he's back on the roads with us! He is done for.

Sabina Silver. I knew he'd have to come back to me to die after all; it's a lonesome thing to die among strangers.

Paul Ruttledge. That is right, that is right, take me up in your brazen claws. But no — no — I will not go out beyond Saturn into the dark. Take me down — down to that field under the earth, under the roots of the grave.

Sabina Silver. I don't know what he is saying. I never could understand his talk.

Paul Ruttledge. O plunge me into the wine barrel, into the wine barrel of God.

Sabina Silver. Won't you speak to me, Paul? Don't you know me? I am Sibby; don't you remember me, Sibby, your wife?

Charlie Ward. He sees you now; I think he knows you.

[Paul Ruttledge *has raised himself on his elbow and is looking at* Sabina Silver.

Sabina Silver. He knows me. I was sure he would know me.

Paul Ruttledge. Colman, Colman, remember always where there is nothing there is God. [*He sinks down again.*

One of the Crowd. [*Coming back with two or three others.*] I knew they must be in the rocks.

Charlie Ward. Well, he's gone! There'll soon be none of us left at all. And I never knew what it was he did that brought him to us.

Sabina Silver. Oh, Paul, Paul!

[*Begins to keen very low, swaying herself to and fro.*

One of the Crowd. [*To* Charlie Ward.] Was he a friend of yours?

Charlie Ward. He was, indeed. I must do what I can for him now.

One of the Crowd. That's natural, that's natural. It's a pity they did it. They'd best have left him alone. We'd best be going back to the town.

[Sabina Silver *raises the keen louder. The* Strangers *and* Charlie Ward *take off their hats.*

Curtain

Cathleen Ni Houlihan

This one-act play was written in collaboration with Lady Gregory in 1902 and it was first performed on 2 April of the same year. It is a startlingly nationalistic work, encouraging young men to sacrifice their lives for the heroine Cathleen ni Houlihan, who represents an independent and separate Irish state. The title character first appears as an old woman, at the door of a family celebrating their son's wedding. She describes her four "beautiful green fields," representing the four provinces, that have been unjustly taken from her. With little subtlety, she requests a blood sacrifice, declaring that "many a child will be born and there will be no father at the christening".

A scene from the 1912 production of the play

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

PETER GILLANE.
MICHAEL GILLANE his son, going to be married.
PATRICK GILLANE a lad of twelve, Michael's brother.
BRIDGET GILLANE Peter's wife.
DELIA CAHEL engaged to MICHAEL.
THE POOR OLD WOMAN.
NEIGHBOURS.

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

Scene: *Interior of a cottage close to Killala, in 1798.* Bridget *is standing at a table undoing a parcel.* Peter *is sitting at one side of the fire,* Patrick *at the other*.

Peter. What is that sound I hear?

Patrick. I don't hear anything. [*He listens.*] I hear it now. It's like cheering. [*He goes to the window and looks out.*] I wonder what they are cheering about. I don't see anybody.

Peter. It might be a hurling match.

Patrick. There's no hurling to-day. It must be down in the town the cheering is.

Bridget. I suppose the boys must be having some sport of their own. Come over here, Peter, and look at Michael's wedding-clothes.

Peter [*shifts his chair to table*]. Those are grand clothes, indeed.

Bridget. You hadn't clothes like that when you married me, and no coat to put on of a Sunday any more than any other day.

Peter. That is true, indeed. We never thought a son of our own would be wearing a suit of that sort for his wedding, or have so good a place to bring a wife to.

Patrick [*who is still at the window*]. There's an old woman coming down the road. I don't know, is it here she's coming?

Bridget. It will be a neighbour coming to hear about Michael's wedding. Can you see who it is?

Patrick. I think it is a stranger, but she's not coming to the house. She's turned into the gap that goes down where Murteen and his sons are shearing sheep. [*He turns towards* Bridget.] Do you remember what Winny of the Cross Roads was saying the other night about the strange woman that goes through the country whatever time there's war or trouble coming?

Bridget. Don't be bothering us about Winny's talk, but go and open the door for your brother. I hear him coming up the path.

Peter. I hope he has brought Delia's fortune with him safe, for fear her people might go back on the bargain and I after making it. Trouble enough I had making it.

[Patrick *opens the door and* Michael *comes in.*]

Bridget. What kept you, Michael? We were looking out for you this long time.

Michael. I went round by the priest's house to bid him be ready to marry us to-morrow.

Bridget. Did he say anything?

Michael. He said it was a very nice match, and that he was never better pleased to marry any two in his parish than myself and Delia Cahel.

Peter. Have you got the fortune, Michael?

Michael. Here it is.

[*He puts bag on table and goes over and leans against the chimney-jamb.* Bridget, *who has been all this time examining the clothes, pulling the seams and trying the lining of the pockets, etc., puts the clothes on the dresser.*]

Peter [*getting up and taking the bag in his hand and turning out the money*]. Yes, I made the bargain well for you, Michael. Old John Cahel would sooner have kept a share of this awhile longer. "Let me keep the half of it till the first boy is born," says he. "You will not," says I. "Whether there is or is not a boy, the whole hundred pounds must be in Michael's hands before he brings your daughter in the house." The wife spoke to him then, and he gave in at the end.

Bridget. You seem well pleased to be handling the money, Peter.

Peter. Indeed, I wish I had had the luck to get a hundred pounds, or twenty pounds itself, with the wife I married.

Bridget. Well, if I didn't bring much I didn't get much. What had you the day I married you but a flock of hens and you feeding them, and a few lambs and you driving them to the market at Ballina? [*She is vexed and bangs a jug on the dresser.*] If I brought no fortune, I worked it out in my bones, laying down the baby, Michael that is standing there now, on a stook of straw, while I dug the potatoes, and never asking big dresses or anything but to be working.

Peter. That is true, indeed. [*He pats her arm.*]

Bridget. Leave me alone now till I ready the house for the woman that is to come into it.

Peter. You are the best woman in Ireland, but money is good, too. [*He begins handling the money again and sits down.*] I never thought to see so much money within my four walls. We can do great things now we have it. We can take the ten acres of land we have a chance of since Jamsie Dempsey died, and stock it. We will go to the fair of Ballina to buy the stock. Did Delia ask any of the money for her own use, Michael?

Michael. She did not, indeed. She did not seem to take much notice of it, or to look at it at all.

Bridget. That's no wonder. Why would she look at it when she had yourself to look at, a fine, strong young man? It is proud she must be to get you, a good steady boy that will make use of the money, and not be running through it or spending it on drink like another.

Peter. It's likely Michael himself was not thinking much of the fortune either, but of what sort the girl was to look at.

Michael [*coming over towards the table*]. Well, you would like a nice comely girl to be beside you, and to go walking with you. The fortune only lasts for a while, but the woman will be there always.

[*Cheers.*]

Patrick [*turning round from the window*]. They are cheering again down in the town. Maybe they are landing horses from Enniscrone. They do be cheering when the horses take the water well.

Michael. There are no horses in it. Where would they be going and no fair at hand? Go down to the town, Patrick, and see what is going on.

Patrick [*opens the door to go out, but stops for a moment on the threshold*]. Will Delia remember, do you think, to bring the greyhound pup she promised me when she would be coming to the house?

Michael. She will surely.

[Patrick *goes out, leaving the door open.*]

Peter. It will be Patrick's turn next to be looking for a fortune, but he won't find it so easy to get it and he with no place of his own.

Bridget. I do be thinking sometimes, now things are going so well with us, and the Cahels such a good back to us in the district, and Delia's own uncle a priest, we might be put in the way of making Patrick a priest some day, and he so good at his books.

Peter. Time enough, time enough; you have always your head full of plans, Bridget.

Bridget. We will be well able to give him learning, and not to send him trampling the country like a poor scholar that lives on charity.

[*Cheers.*]

Michael. They're not done cheering yet.

[*He goes over to the door and stands there for a moment, putting up his hand to shade his eyes.*]

Bridget. Do you see anything?

Michael. I see an old woman coming up the path.

Bridget. Who is it, I wonder. It must be the strange woman Patrick saw awhile ago.

Michael. I don't think it's one of the neighbours anyway, but she has her cloak over her face.

Bridget. It might be some poor woman heard we were making ready for the wedding and came to look for her share.

Peter. I may as well put the money out of sight. There is no use leaving it out for every stranger to look at.

[*He goes over to a large box in the corner, opens it, and puts the bag in and fumbles at the lock.*]

Michael. There she is, father! [*An* Old Woman *passes the window slowly; she looks at* Michael *as she passes.*] I'd sooner a stranger not to come to the house the night before my wedding.

Bridget. Open the door, Michael; don't keep the poor woman waiting.

[*The* Old Woman *comes in.* Michael *stands aside to make way for her.*]

Old Woman. God save all here!

Peter. God save you kindly!

Old Woman. You have good shelter here.

Peter. You are welcome to whatever shelter we have.

Bridget. Sit down there by the fire and welcome.

Old Woman [*warming her hands*]. There is a hard wind outside.

[Michael *watches her curiously from the door*. Peter *comes over to the table.*]

Peter. Have you travelled far to-day?

Old Woman. I have travelled far, very far; there are few have travelled so far as myself, and there's many a one that doesn't make me welcome. There was one that had strong sons I thought were friends of mine, but they were shearing their sheep, and they wouldn't listen to me.

Peter. It's a pity indeed for any person to have no place of their own.

Old Woman. That's true for you indeed, and it's long I'm on the roads since I first went wandering.

Bridget. It is a wonder you are not worn out with so much wandering.

Old Woman. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When the people see me quiet, they think old age has come on me and that all the stir has gone out of me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking to my friends.

Bridget. What was it put you wandering?

Old Woman. Too many strangers in the house.

Bridget. Indeed you look as if you'd had your share of trouble.

Old Woman. I have had trouble indeed.

Bridget. What was it put the trouble on you?

Old Woman. My land that was taken from me.

Peter. Was it much land they took from you?

Old Woman. My four beautiful green fields.

Peter [*aside to* Bridget]. Do you think could she be the widow Casey that was put out of her holding at Kilglass awhile ago?

Bridget. She is not. I saw the widow Casey one time at the market in Ballina, a stout fresh woman.

Peter [*to* Old Woman]. Did you hear a noise of cheering, and you coming up the hill?

Old Woman. I thought I heard the noise I used to hear when my friends came to visit me. [*She begins singing half to herself.*]

I will go cry with the woman,

For yellow-haired Donough is dead,

With a hempen rope for a neckcloth,

And a white cloth on his head, —

Michael [*coming from the door*]. What is that you are singing, ma'am?

Old Woman. Singing I am about a man I knew one time, yellow-haired Donough, that was hanged in Galway. [*She goes on singing, much louder.*]

I am come to cry with you, woman,

My hair is unwound and unbound;

I remember him ploughing his field,

Turning up the red side of the ground,

And building his barn on the hill With the good mortared stone; O! we'd have pulled down the gallows Had it happened in Enniscrone!

Michael. What was it brought him to his death?

Old Woman. He died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me.

Peter [*aside to* Bridget]. Her trouble has put her wits astray.

Michael. Is it long since that song was made? Is it long since he got his death?

Old Woman. Not long, not long. But there were others that died for love of me a long time ago.

Michael. Were they neighbours of your own, ma'am?

Old Woman. Come here beside me and I'll tell you about them. [Michael *sits down beside her at the hearth.*] There was a red man of the O'Donnells from the north, and a man of the O'Sullivans from the south, and there was one Brian that lost his life at Clontarf by the sea, and there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die to-morrow.

Michael. Is it in the west that men will die to-morrow?

Old Woman. Come nearer, nearer to me.

Bridget. Is she right, do you think? Or is she a woman from beyond the world?

Peter. She doesn't know well what she's talking about, with the want and the trouble she has gone through.

Bridget. The poor thing, we should treat her well.

Peter. Give her a drink of milk and a bit of the oaten cake.

Bridget. Maybe we should give her something along with that, to bring her on her way. A few pence, or a shilling itself, and we with so much money in the house.

Peter. Indeed I'd not begrudge it to her if we had it to spare, but if we go running through what we have, we'll soon have to break the hundred pounds, and that would be a pity.

Bridget. Shame on you, Peter. Give her the shilling, and your blessing with it, or our own luck will go from us.

[Peter *goes to the box and takes out a shilling.*]

Bridget [*to the* Old Woman]. Will you have a drink of milk?

Old Woman. It is not food or drink that I want.

Peter [*offering the shilling*]. Here is something for you.

Old Woman. That is not what I want. It is not silver I want.

Peter. What is it you would be asking for?

Old Woman. If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all.

[Peter *goes over to the table, staring at the shilling in his hand in a bewildered way, and stands whispering to* Bridget.]

Michael. Have you no one to care you in your age, ma'am?

Old Woman. I have not. With all the lovers that brought me their love, I never set out the bed for any.

Michael. Are you lonely going the roads, ma'am?

Old Woman. I have my thoughts and I have my hopes.

Michael. What hopes have you to hold to?

Old Woman. The hope of getting my beautiful fields back again; the hope of putting the strangers out of my house.

Michael. What way will you do that, ma'am?

Old Woman. I have good friends that will help me. They are gathering to help me now. I am not afraid. If they are put down to-day, they will get the upper hand to-morrow. [*She gets up.*] I must be going to meet my friends. They are coming to help me, and I must be there to welcome them. I must call the neighbours together to welcome them.

Michael. I will go with you.

Bridget. It is not her friends you have to go and welcome, Michael; it is the girl coming into the house you have to welcome. You have plenty to do, it is food and drink you have to bring to the house. The woman that is coming home is not coming with empty hands; you would not have an empty house before her. [*To the* Old Woman.] Maybe you don't know, ma'am, that my son is going to be married to-morrow.

Old Woman. It is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help.

Peter [*to* Bridget]. Who is she, do you think, at all?

Bridget. You did not tell us your name yet, ma'am.

Old Woman. Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

Peter. I think I knew someone of that name once. Who was it, I wonder? It must have been someone I knew when I was a boy. No, no, I remember, I heard it in a song.

Old Woman [*who is standing in the doorway*]. They are wondering that there were songs made for me; there have been many songs made for me. I heard one on the wind this morning. [*She sings.*]

Do not make a great keening When the graves have been dug to-morrow. Do not call the white-scarfed riders To the burying that shall be to-morrow.

Do not spread food to call strangers To the wakes that shall be to-morrow; Do not give money for prayers For the dead that shall die to-morrow ...

they will have no need of prayers, they will have no need of prayers.

Michael. I do not know what that song means, but tell me something I can do for you.

Peter. Come over to me, Michael.

Michael. Hush, father, listen to her.

Old Woman. It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born, and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that had red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake; and for all that, they will think they are well paid.

[*She goes out; her voice is heard outside singing.*]

They shall be remembered for ever, They shall be alive for ever, They shall be speaking for ever, The people shall hear them for ever.

Bridget [*to* Peter]. Look at him, Peter; he has the look of a man that has got the touch. [*Raising her voice.*] Look here, Michael, at the wedding-clothes. Such grand clothes as these are. You have a right to fit them on now; it would be a pity to-morrow if they did not fit. The boys would be laughing at you. Take them, Michael, and go into the room and fit them on. [*She puts them on his arm.*]

Michael. What wedding are you talking of? What clothes will I be wearing to-morrow?

Bridget. These are the clothes you are going to wear when you marry Delia Cahel to-morrow.

Michael. I had forgotten that.

[*He looks at the clothes and turns towards the inner room, but stops at the sound of cheering outside.*]

Peter. There is the shouting come to our own door. What is it has happened?

[Patrick *and* Delia *come in.*]

Patrick. There are ships in the Bay; the French are landing at Killala!

[Peter *takes his pipe from his mouth and his hat off, and stands up. The clothes slip from* Michael's *arm.*]

Delia. Michael! [*He takes no notice.*] Michael! [*He turns towards her.*] Why do you look at me like a stranger?

[*She drops his arm*. Bridget *goes over towards her.*]

Patrick. The boys are all hurrying down the hillsides to join the French.

Delia. Michael won't be going to join the French.

Bridget [*to* Peter]. Tell him not to go, Peter.

Peter. It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying.

Bridget. Try and coax him over to the fire.

Delia. Michael! Michael! You won't leave me! You won't join the French, and we going to be married!

[*She puts her arms about him; he turns towards her as if about to yield.* Old Woman's *voice outside.*]

They shall be speaking for ever, The people shall hear them for ever.

[Michael *breaks away from* Delia *and goes out.*]

Peter [*to* Patrick, *laying a hand on his arm*]. Did you see an old woman going down the path?

Patrick. I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.

The Hour-Glass

A MORALITY

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A WISE MAN.
SOME PUPILS.
A FOOL.
AN ANGEL.
THE WISE MAN’S WIFE AND TWO CHILDREN.

THE HOUR-GLASS

Scene: *A large room with a door at the back and another at the side or else a curtained place where the persons can enter by parting the curtains. A desk and a chair at one side. An hour-glass on a stand near the door. A creepy stool near it. Some benches. A* Wise Man *sitting at his desk.*

Wise M. [*turning over the pages of a book*]. Where is that passage I am to explain to my pupils to-day? Here it is, and the book says that it was written by a beggar on the walls of Babylon: "There are two living countries, the one visible and the one invisible; and when it is winter with us it is summer in that country, and when the November winds are up among us it is lambing time there." I wish that my pupils had asked me to explain any other passage. [*The* Fool *comes in and stands at the door holding out his hat. He has a pair of shears in the other hand.*] It sounds to me like foolishness; and yet that cannot be, for the writer of this book, where I have found so much knowledge, would not have set it by itself on this page, and surrounded it with so many images and so many deep colours and so much fine gilding, if it had been foolishness.

Fool. Give me a penny.

Wise M. [*turns to another page*]. Here he has written: "The learned in old times forgot the visible country." That I understand, but I have taught my learners better.

Fool. Won't you give me a penny?

Wise M. What do you want? The words of the wise Saracen will not teach you much.

Fool. Such a great wise teacher as you are will not refuse a penny to a Fool.

Wise M. What do you know about wisdom?

Fool. Oh, I know! I know what I have seen.

Wise M. What is it you have seen?

Fool. When I went by Kilcluan where the bells used to be ringing at the break of every day, I could hear nothing but the people snoring in their houses. When I went by Tubbervanach where the young men used to be climbing the hill to the blessed well, they were sitting at the crossroads playing cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they said it was no misfortune, but it was the wisdom they had learned from your teaching.

Wise M. Run round to the kitchen, and my wife will give you something to eat.

Fool. That is foolish advice for a wise man to give.

Wise M. Why, Fool?

Fool. What is eaten is gone. I want pennies for my bag. I must buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak. And I want snares to catch the rabbits and the squirrels and the hares, and a pot to cook them in.

Wise M. Go away. I have other things to think of now than giving you pennies.

Fool. Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. Bresal the Fisherman lets me sleep among the nets in his loft in the winter-time because he says I bring him luck; and in the summer-time the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It is lucky even to look at me or to touch me, but it is much more lucky to give me a penny. [*Holds out his hand.*] If I wasn't lucky, I'd starve.

Wise M. What have you got the shears for?

Fool. I won't tell you. If I told you, you would drive them away.

Wise M. Whom would I drive away?

Fool. I won't tell you.

Wise M. Not if I give you a penny?

Fool. No.

Wise M. Not if I give you two pennies?

Fool. You will be very lucky if you give me two pennies, but I won't tell you!

Wise M. Three pennies?

Fool. Four, and I will tell you!

Wise M. Very well, four. But I will not call you Teigue the Fool any longer.

Fool. Let me come close to you where nobody will hear me. But first you must promise you will not drive them away. [Wise M. *nods.*] Every day men go out dressed in black and spread great black nets over the hills, great black nets.

Wise M. Why do they do that?

Fool. That they may catch the feet of the angels. But every morning, just before the dawn, I go out and cut the nets with my shears, and the angels fly away.

Wise M. Ah, now I know that you are Teigue the Fool. You have told me that I am wise, and I have never seen an angel.

Fool. I have seen plenty of angels.

Wise M. Do you bring luck to the angels too?

Fool. Oh, no, no! No one could do that. But they are always there if one looks about one; they are like the blades of grass.

Wise M. When do you see them?

Fool. When one gets quiet, then something wakes up inside one, something happy and quiet like the stars — not like the seven that move, but like the fixed stars. [*He points upward.*]

Wise M. And what happens then?

Fool. Then all in a minute one smells summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, and their clothes are the colour of burning sods.

Wise M. Is it long since you have seen them, Teigue the Fool?

Fool. Not long, glory be to God! I saw one coming behind me just now. It was not laughing, but it had clothes the colour of burning sods, and there was something shining about its head.

Wise M. Well, there are your four pennies. You, a fool, say "glory be to God," but before I came the wise men said it.

Fool. Four pennies! That means a great deal of luck. Great teacher, I have brought you plenty of luck!

[*He goes out shaking the bag.*]

Wise M. Though they call him Teigue the Fool, he is not more foolish than everybody used to be, with their dreams and their preachings and their three worlds; but I have overthrown their three worlds with the seven sciences. [*He touches the books with his hands.*] With Philosophy that was made from the lonely star, I have taught them to forget Theology; with Architecture, I have hidden the ramparts of their cloudy heaven; with Music, the fierce planets' daughter whose hair is always on fire, and with Grammar that is the moon's daughter, I have shut their ears to the imaginary harpings and speech of the angels; and I have made formations of battle with Arithmetic that have put the hosts of heaven to the rout. But, Rhetoric and Dialectic, that have been born out of the light star and out of the amorous star, you have been my spear-man and my catapult! Oh! my swift horsemen! Oh! my keen darting arguments, it is because of you that I have overthrown the hosts of foolishness! [*An* Angel, *in a dress the colour of embers, and carrying a blossoming apple bough in her hand and a gilded halo about her head, stands upon the threshold.*] Before I came, men's

minds were stuffed with folly about a heaven where birds sang the hours, and about angels that came and stood upon men's thresholds. But I have locked the visions into heaven and turned the key upon them. Well, I must consider this passage about the two countries. My mother used to say something of the kind. She would say that when our bodies sleep our souls awake, and that whatever withers here ripens yonder, and that harvests are snatched from us that they may feed invisible people. But the meaning of the book may be different, for only fools and women have thoughts like that; their thoughts were never written upon the walls of Babylon. I must ring the bell for my pupils. [*He sees the* Angel.] What are you? Who are you? I think I saw some that were like you in my dreams when I was a child — that bright thing, that dress that is the colour of embers! But I have done with dreams, I have done with dreams.

Angel. I am the Angel of the Most High God.

Wise M. Why have you come to me?

Angel. I have brought you a message.

Wise M. What message have you got for me?

Angel. You will die within the hour. You will die when the last grains have fallen in this glass. [*She turns the hour-glass.*]

Wise M. My time to die has not come. I have my pupils. I have a young wife and children that I cannot leave. Why must I die?

Angel. You must die because no souls have passed over the threshold of Heaven since you came into this country. The threshold is grassy, and the gates are rusty, and the angels that keep watch there are lonely.

Wise M. Where will death bring me to?

Angel. The doors of Heaven will not open to you, for you have denied the existence of Heaven; and the doors of Purgatory will not open to you, for you have denied the existence of Purgatory.

Wise M. But I have also denied the existence of Hell!

Angel. Hell is the place of those who deny.

Wise M. [*kneels*]. I have, indeed, denied everything, and have taught others to deny. I have believed in nothing but what my senses told me. But, oh! beautiful Angel, forgive me, forgive me!

Angel. You should have asked forgiveness long ago.

Wise M. Had I seen your face as I see it now, oh! beautiful angel, I would have believed, I would have asked forgiveness. Maybe you do not know how easy it is to doubt. Storm, death, the grass rotting, many sicknesses, those are the messengers that came to me. Oh! why are you silent? You carry the pardon of the Most High; give it to me! I would kiss your hands if I were not afraid — no, no, the hem of your dress!

Angel. You let go undying hands too long ago to take hold of them now.

Wise M. You cannot understand. You live in that country people only see in their dreams. Maybe it is as hard for you to understand why we disbelieve as it is for us to believe. Oh! what have I said! You know everything! Give me time to undo what I have done. Give me a year — a month — a day — an hour! Give me to this hour's end, that I may undo what I have done!

Angel. You cannot undo what you have done. Yet I have this power with my message. If you can find one that believes before the hour's end, you shall come to Heaven after the years of Purgatory. For, from one fiery seed, watched over by those that sent me, the harvest can come again to heap the golden threshing floor. But now farewell, for I am weary of the weight of time.

Wise M. Blessed be the Father, blessed be the Son, blessed be the Spirit, blessed be the Messenger They have sent!

Angel [*at the door and pointing at the hour-glass*]. In a little while the uppermost glass will be empty. [*Goes out.*]

Wise M. Everything will be well with me. I will call my pupils; they only say they doubt. [*Pulls the bell.*] They will be here in a moment. They want to please me; they pretend that they disbelieve. Belief is too old to be overcome all in a minute. Besides, I can prove what I once disproved. [*Another pull at the bell.*] They are coming now. I will go to my desk. I will speak quietly, as if nothing had happened.

[*He stands at the desk with a fixed look in his eyes. The voices of the pupils are heard outside singing these words.*]

I was going the road one day, O the brown and the yellow beer, And I met with a man that was no right man O my dear, O my dear.

[*The sound grows louder as they come nearer, but ceases on the threshold.*]

Enter Pupils *and the* Fool.

Fool. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Who is that pulling at my bag? King's son, do not pull at my bag.

A Young Man. Did your friends the angels give you that bag? Why don't they fill your bag for you?

Fool. Give me pennies! Give me some pennies!

A Young M. What do you want pennies for? — that great bag at your waist is heavy.

Fool. I want to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak, and snares to catch rabbits and the squirrels that steal the nuts, and hares, and a great pot to cook them in.

A Young M. Why don't your friends tell you where buried treasures are? Why don't they make you dream about treasures? If one dreams three times there is always treasure.

Fool [*holding out his hat*]. Give me pennies! Give me pennies!

[*They throw pennies into his hat. He is standing close to the door, that he may hold out his hat to each newcomer.*]

A Young M. Master, will you have Teigue the Fool for a scholar?

Another Young M. Teigue, will you give us your pennies if we teach you lessons? No, he goes to school for nothing on the mountains. Tell us what you learn on the mountains, Teigue.

Wise M. Be silent all! [*He has been standing silent, looking away.*] Stand still in your places, for there is something I would have you tell me.

[*A moment's pause. They all stand round in their places.* Teigue *still stands at the door.*]

Wise M. Is there anyone amongst you who believes in God? In Heaven? Or in Purgatory? Or in Hell?

All the Young Men. No one, Master! No one!

Wise M. I knew you would all say that; but do not be afraid. I will not be angry. Tell me the truth. Do you not believe?

A Young M. We once did, but you have taught us to know better.

Wise M. Oh, teaching! teaching does not go very deep! The heart remains unchanged under it all. You have the faith that you have always had, and you are afraid to tell me.

A Young M. No, no, Master!

Wise M. If you tell me that you have not changed, I shall be glad and not angry.

A Young M. [*to his* Neighbour]. He wants somebody to dispute with.

His Neighbour. I knew that from the beginning.

A Young M. That is not the subject for to-day; you were going to talk about the words the beggar wrote upon the walls of Babylon.

Wise M. If there is one amongst you that believes, he will be my best friend. Surely there is one amongst you. [*They are all silent.*] Surely what you learned at your mother's knees has not been so soon forgotten.

A Young M. Master, till you came, no teacher in this land was able to get rid of foolishness and ignorance. But every one has listened to you, every one has learned the truth. You have had your last disputation.

Another. What a fool you made of that monk in the market-place! He had not a word to say.

Wise M. [*comes from his desk and stands among them in the middle of the room*]. Pupils, dear friends, I have deceived you all this time. It was I myself who was ignorant. There is a God. There is a Heaven. There is fire that passes and there is fire that lasts for ever.

[Teigue, *through all this, is sitting on a stool by the door, reckoning on his fingers what he will buy with his money.*]

A Young M. [*to* Another]. He will not be satisfied till we dispute with him. [*To the* Wise Man.] Prove it, Master. Have you seen them?

Wise M. [*in a low, solemn voice*]. Just now, before you came in, someone came to the door, and when I looked up I saw an angel standing there.

A Young M. You were in a dream. Anybody can see an angel in his dreams.

Wise M. Oh, my God! It was not a dream! I was awake, waking as I am now. I tell you I was awake as I am now.

A Young M. Some dream when they are awake, but they are the crazy, and who would believe what they say? Forgive me, Master, but that is what you taught me to say. That is what you said to the monk when he spoke of the visions of the saints and the martyrs.

Another Young M. You see how well we remember your teaching.

Wise M. Out, out from my sight! I want someone with belief. I must find that grain the Angel spoke of before I die. I tell you I must find it, and you answer me with arguments. Out with you, out of my sight! [*The* Young Men *laugh.*]

A Young M. How well he plays at faith! He is like the monk when he had nothing more to say.

Wise M. Out, out, this is no time for laughter! Out with you, though you are a king's son! [*They begin to hurry out.*]

A Young M. Come, come; he wants us to find someone who will dispute with him.

[*All go out.*]

Wise M. [*alone; he goes to the door at the side*]. I will call my wife. She will believe; women always believe. [*He opens the door and calls.*] Bridget! Bridget! [Bridget *comes in, wearing her apron, her sleeves turned up from her floury arms.*] Bridget, tell me the truth; do not say what you think will please me. Do you sometimes say your prayers?

Bridget. Prayers! No, you taught me to leave them off long ago. At first I was sorry, but I am glad now, for I am sleepy in the evening.

Wise M. But do you not believe in God?

Bridget. Oh, a good wife only believes what her husband tells her!

Wise M. But sometimes, when you are alone, when I am in the school and the children asleep, do you not think about the saints, about the things you used to believe in? What do you think of when you are alone?

Bridget [*considering*]. I think about nothing. Sometimes I wonder if the linen is bleaching white, or I go out to see if the cows are picking up the chickens' food.

Wise M. Oh, what can I do! Is there nobody who believes he can never die? I must go and find somebody! [*He goes towards the door, but stops with his eyes fixed on the hour-glass.*] I cannot go out; I cannot leave that; go and call my pupils again — I will make them understand — I will say to them that only amid spiritual terror, or only when all that laid hold on life is shaken can we see truth — but no, do not call them, they would answer as I have bid.

Bridget. You want somebody to get up an argument with.

Wise M. Oh, look out of the door and tell me if there is anybody there in the street! I cannot leave this glass; somebody might shake it! Then the sand would fall more quickly.

Bridget. I don't understand what you are saying. [*Looks out.*] There is a great crowd of people talking to your pupils.

Wise M. Oh, run out, Bridget, and see if they have found somebody that all the time while I was teaching understood nothing or did not listen.

Bridget [*wiping her arms in her apron and pulling down her sleeves*]. It's a hard thing to be married to a man of learning that must be always having

arguments. [*Goes out and shouts through the kitchen door.*] Don't be meddling with the bread, children, while I'm out.

Wise M. [*kneels down*]. "*Confiteor Deo omnipotente beatæ Mariæ....*" I have forgotten it all. It is thirty years since I have said a prayer. I must pray in the common tongue, like a clown begging in the market, like Teigue the Fool! [*He prays.*] Help me, Father, Son, and Spirit!

[Bridget *enters, followed by the* Fool, *who is holding out his hat to her.*]

Fool. Give me something; give me a penny to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak.

Bridget. I have no pennies. [*To the* Wise Man.] Your pupils cannot find anybody to argue with you. There is nobody in the whole country who has enough belief to fill a pipe with since you put down the monk. Can't you be quiet now and not always wanting to have arguments? It must be terrible to have a mind like that.

Wise M. I am lost! I am lost!

Bridget. Leave me alone now; I have to make the bread for you and the children.

Wise M. Out of this, woman, out of this, I say! [Bridget *goes through the kitchen door.*] Will nobody find a way to help me! But she spoke of my children. I had forgotten them. They will believe. It is only those who have reason that doubt; the young are full of faith. Bridget, Bridget, send my children to me.

Bridget [*inside*]. Your father wants you; run to him now.

[*The two* Children *come in. They stand together a little way from the threshold of the kitchen door, looking timidly at their father.*]

Wise M. Children, what do you believe? Is there a Heaven? Is there a Hell? Is there a Purgatory?

First Child. We haven't forgotten, father.

The Other Child. Oh, no, father. [*They both speak together, as if in school.*] There is nothing we cannot see; there is nothing we cannot touch.

First Child. Foolish people used to think that there was, but you are very learned and you have taught us better.

Wise M. You are just as bad as the others, just as bad as the others! Do not run away; come back to me. [*The* Children *begin to cry and run away.*] Why are you afraid? I will teach you better — no, I will never teach you again. Go to your mother! no, she will not be able to teach them.... Help them, O God!... The grains are going very quickly. There is very little sand in the uppermost glass. Somebody will come for me in a moment; perhaps he is at the door now! All creatures that have reason doubt. O that the grass and the plants could speak! Somebody has said that they would wither if they doubted. O speak to me, O grass blades! O fingers of God's certainty, speak to me! You are millions and you will not speak. I dare not know the moment the messenger will come for me. I will cover the glass. [*He covers it and brings it to the desk. Sees the* Fool, *who is sitting by the door playing with some flowers which he has stuck in his hat. He has begun to blow a dandelion head.*] What are you doing?

Fool. Wait a moment. [*He blows.*] Four, five, six.

Wise M. What are you doing that for?

Fool. I am blowing at the dandelion to find out what time it is.

Wise M. You have heard everything! That is why you want to find out what hour it is! You are waiting to see them coming through the door to carry me away. [Fool *goes on blowing.*] Out through the door with you! I will have no one here when they come. [*He seizes the* Fool *by the shoulders, and begins to force him out through the door, then suddenly changes his mind.*] No, I have something to ask you. [*He drags him back into the room.*] Is there a Heaven? Is there a Hell? Is there a Purgatory?

Fool. So you ask me now. When you were asking your pupils, I said to myself, if he would ask Teigue the Fool, Teigue could tell him all about it, for Teigue has learned all about it when he has been cutting the nets.

Wise M. Tell me; tell me!

Fool. I said, Teigue knows everything. Not even the cats or the hares that milk the cows have Teigue's wisdom. But Teigue will not speak; he says nothing.

Wise M. Tell me, tell me! For under the cover the grains are falling, and when they are all fallen I shall die; and my soul will be lost if I have not found somebody that believes! Speak, speak!

Fool [*looking wise*]. No, no, I won't tell you what is in my mind, and I won't tell you what is in my bag. You might steal away my thoughts. I met a bodach on the road yesterday, and he said, "Teigue, tell me how many pennies are in your bag; I will wager three pennies that there are not twenty pennies in your bag; let me put in my hand and count them." But I pulled

the strings tighter, like this; and when I go to sleep every night I hide the bag where no one knows.

Wise M. [*goes towards the hour-glass as if to uncover it*]. No, no, I have not the courage. [*He kneels.*] Have pity upon me, Fool, and tell me!

Fool. Ah! Now, that is different. I am not afraid of you now. But I must come nearer to you; somebody in there might hear what the Angel said.

Wise M. Oh, what did the Angel tell you?

Fool. Once I was alone on the hills, and an angel came by and he said, "Teigue the Fool, do not forget the Three Fires; the Fire that punishes, the Fire that purifies, and the Fire wherein the soul rejoices for ever!"

Wise M. He believes! I am saved! The sand has run out.... [Fool *helps him to his chair.*] I am going from the country of the seven wandering stars, and I am going to the country of the fixed stars!... I understand it all now. One sinks in on God; we do not see the truth; God sees the truth in us. Ring the bell. [Fool *rings bell.*] Are they coming? Tell them, Fool, that when the life and the mind are broken the truth comes through them like peas through a broken peascod. Pray, Fool, that they may be given a sign and carry their souls alive out of the dying world. Your prayers are better than mine.

[Fool *bows his head*. Wise Man's *head sinks on his arm on the books*. Pupils *are heard singing as before, but now they come right into the room before they cease their song.*]

A Young Man. Look at the Fool turned bell-ringer!

Another. What have you called us in for, Teigue? What are you going to tell us?

Another. No wonder he has had dreams! See, he is fast asleep now. [*Goes over and touches him.*] Oh, he is dead!

Fool. Do not stir! He asked for a sign that you might be saved. [*All are silent for a moment.*] ... Look what has come from his mouth ... a little winged thing ... a little shining thing.... It is gone to the door. [*The* Angel *appears in the doorway, stretches out her hands and closes them again.*] The Angel has taken it in her hands.... She will open her hands in the Garden of Paradise. [*They all kneel.*]

Curtain

The Pot of Broth

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

JOHN CONEELY, *an elderly man.*
SIBBY CONEELY, *a young or middle-aged woman.*
A TRAMP.

THE POT OF BROTH

SCENE: *A cottage kitchen. Fire on the hearth; table with cabbage, onions, a plate of meal, etc. Half-open door. A* TRAMP *enters, looks about.*

TRAMP. What sort are the people of this house, I wonder? Was it a good place for me to come to look for my dinner, I wonder? What's in that big pot? [*Lifts cover.]* Nothing at all! What's in the little pot? *[Lifts cover."]* Nothing at all! What's in that bottle, I wonder? [*Takes it up excitedly and tastes*.] Milk! milk in a bottle! I wonder they wouldn't afford a tin can to milk the cow into! Not much chance for a poor man to make a living here. What's in that chest? [*Kneels and tries to lift cover.]* Locked! [*Smells at the keyhole.]* There's a good smell — there must be a still not far off.

[Gets up and sits on chest. A noise heard outside, shouts, footsteps, and loud frightened cackling.

TRAMP. What in the earthly world is going on outside? Any one would think it was the Fiannta-h-Eireann at their hunting!

SIBBY'S *voice.* Stop the gap, let you stop the gap, John. Stop that old schemer of a hen flying up on the thatch like as if she was an eagle!

JOHN'S *voice*. What can I do, Sibby? I all to had my hand upon her when she flew away!

SIBBY'S *voice*. She's out into the garden! Follow after her! She has the wide world before her now.

TRAMP. Sibby he called her. I wonder is it Sibby Coneely's house I am in! If that's so it's a bad chance I have of going out heavier than I came in. I

often heard of her, a regular slave driver that would starve the rats. A niggard with her eyes on kippeens, that would skin a flea for its hide! It was the bad luck of the world brought me here, and not a house or a village between this and Tubber. And it isn't much I have left to bring me on there. [*Begins emptying out his pockets on the chest.*] There's my pipe and not a grain to fill it with! There's my handkerchief I got at the coronation dinner! There's my knife and nothing left of it but the handle. *[Shakes his pocket out.]* And there's a crust of the last dinner I got, and the last I'm likely to get till to-morrow. That's all I have in the world unless the stone I picked up to pelt at that yelping dog a while ago. [*Takes stone out of pocket and tosses it up and down*.] In the time long ago I usen't to have much trouble to find a dinner, getting over the old women and getting round the young ones! I remember the time I met the old minister on the path and sold him his own flock of turkeys. My wits used to fill my stomach then, but I'm afraid they're going from me now with all the hardship I went through.

[Cackling heard again and cries. SIBBY'S *voice.* Catch her, she's round the bush! Put your hands in the nettles, don't be daunted!

[A choked cackle and prolonged screech.

TRAMP. There's a dinner for somebody anyway. That it may be for myself! How will I come round her, I wonder? There is no more pity in her heart than there's a soul in a dog. If all the saints were standing barefoot before her she'd bid them to call another day. It's myself I have to trust to now, and my share of talk. [*Looks at the stone.]* I know what I'll do, I know what the tinker did with a stone, and I'm as good a man as he is anyway. *[He jumps up and waves the stone over his head.]* Now, Sibby! If I don't do it one way I'll do it another. My wits against the world!

There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's cabbage for me
And broth for you,
And beef for Jack the journeyman.

I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead
And a stone at your head,
So as I'd marry poor
Jack the journeyman.

JOHN'S *voice [outside*]. Bring it in, bring it in, Sibby. You'll be late with the priest's dinner.

SIBBY'S *voice*. Can't you wait a minute till I'll draw it?

Enter JOHN.

JOHN. I didn't know there was any one in the house.

TRAMP. It's only this minute I came in, tired with the length of the road I am, and fasting since morning.

JOHN [*begins groping among the pots and pans*]. I'll see can I find anything here for you... I don't see much... maybe there's something in the chest.

[He takes key from a hiding-place at back of hearth, opens chesty takes out bottle, takes out a ham bone and is cutting a bit from it when SIBBY *enters*

carrying chicken by the neck. JOHN *drops the ham bone on a bench.*

SIBBY. Hurry now, John, after all the time you have wasted. Why didn't you steal up on the old hen that time she was scratching in the dust?

JOHN. Sure I thought one of the chickens would be the tenderest.

SIBBY. Cock you up with tenderness! All the expense I'm put to! My grand hen I've been feeding these five years! Wouldn't that have been enough to part with? Indeed I wouldn't have thought of parting with her itself but she had got tired of laying since Easter.

JOHN. Well, I thought we ought to give his Reverence something that would have a little good in it.

SIBBY. What does the age of it matter? A hen's a hen when it's on the table. [*Sitting down to pluck chicken]* Why couldn't the Kernans have given the priest his dinner the way they always do? What did it matter their mother's brother to have died? It is an excuse they had made up to put the expense of the dinner on me.

JOHN. Well, I hope you have a good bit of bacon to put in the pot along with the chicken.

SIBBY. Let me alone. The taste of meat on the knife is all that high-up people like the clergy care for, nice genteel people, no way greedy like potato diggers or harvest men.

JOHN. Well, I never saw the man, gentle or simple, wouldn't be glad of his fill of bacon and he hungry.

SIBBY. Let me alone, I'll show the Kernans what I can do. I have what is better than bacon, a nice bit of a ham I am keeping in the chest this good while, thinking we might want it for company. *[She catches sight of* TRAMP *and calls out.]* Who is there? A beggar man is it? Then you may quit this house if you please. We have nothing for you. [*She gets up and opens the door.]*

TRAMP *[comes forward]*. It is a mistake you are making, ma'am, it is not asking anything I am. It is giving I am more used to. I was never in a house yet but there would be a welcome for me in it again.

SIBBY. Well, you have the appearance of a beggar, and if it isn't begging you are what way do you make your living?

TRAMP. If I was a beggar, ma'am, it is to common people I would be going and not to a nice grand woman like yourself, that is only used to be talking with high-up noble people.

SIBBY. Well, what is it you are asking? If it's a bit to eat you want, I can't give it to you, for I have company coming that will clear all before them.

TRAMP. Is it me ask anything to eat? *[Holds up stone.]* I have here what is better than beef and mutton, and currant cakes and sacks of flour.

SIBBY. What is it at all?

TRAMP [*mysteriously*]. Those that gave it to me wouldn't like me to tell that.

SIBBY *[to* JOHN]. DO you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe?

JOHN. Your mind is always running on the Sidhe since the time they made John Molloy find buried gold on the bridge of Limerick. I see nothing in it but a stone.

TRAMP. What can you see in it, you that never saw what it can do?

JOHN. What is it it can do?

TRAMP. It can do many things, and what it's going to do now is to make me a drop of broth for my dinner.

SIBBY. I'd like to have a stone that could make broth.

TRAMP. No one in the world but myself has one, ma'am, and no other stone in the world has the same power, for it has enchantment on it. All I'll ask of you now, ma'am, is the loan of a pot with a drop of boiling water in it.

SIBBY. You're welcome to that much. John, fill the small pot with water.

[John Jills the potjrom a kettle. TRAMP [*putting in stone].* There now, that's all I have to do but to put it on the fire to boil, and it's a grand pot of broth will be before me then.

SIBBY. And is that all you have to put in it? TRAMP. Nothing at all but that — only, maybe, a bit of an herb for fear the enchantment might slip away from it. You wouldn't have a bit of Slanlus in the house, ma'am, that was cut with a black-handled knife?

SIBBY. No, indeed, I have none of that in the house.

TRAMP. Or a bit of the Fearavan that was picked when the wind was from the north?

SIBBY. No, indeed, I'm sorry there's none.

TRAMP. Or a sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs?

JOHN. There's plenty of it by the hedge. I'll go out and get it for you.

TRAMP. Oh, don't mind taking so much trouble; those leaves beside me will do well enough. *[He takes a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and puts them in.]*

SIBBY. But where at all did you get the stone?

TRAMP. Well, it is how it happened. I was out one time, and a grand greyhound with me, and it followed a hare, and I went after it. And I came up at last to the edge of a gravel pit where there were a few withered furze bushes, and there was my fine hound sitting up, and it shivering, and a little old man sitting before him, and he taking off a hareskin coat. [*Looking round at the ham bone*.] Give me the loan of a kippeen to stir the pot with.... *[He takes the ham bone and puts it into the pot.*

JOHN. Oh! the ham bone!

TRAMP. I didn't say a ham bone, I said a hare-skin coat.

SIBBY. Hold your tongue, John, if it's deaf you are getting.

TRAMP *[stirring the pot with the ham bone]* Well, as I was telling you he was sitting up, and one time I thought he was as small as a nut, and the next minute I thought his head to be in the stars. Frightened I was.

SIBBY. No wonder, no wonder at all in that.

TRAMP. He took the little stone then — that stone I have with me — out of the side pocket of his coat, and he showed it to me. ‘Call off your dog,’ says he, ‘and I’ll give you that stone, and if ever you want a good drop of broth or a bit of stirabout, or a drop of poteen itself, all you have to do is to put it down in a pot with a drop of water and stir it awhile, and you’ll have the thing you were wanting ready before you.’

SIBBY. Poteen! Would it make that?

TRAMP. It would, ma’am; and wine, the same as the Clare Miltia uses.

SIBBY. Let me see what does it look like now. [Is *bending forward.]*

TRAMP. Don’t look at it for your life, ma’am. It might bring bad luck on any one that would look at it, and it boiling. I must put a cover on the pot, or I must colour the water some way. Give me a handful of that meal.

[SIBBY *holds out a -plate of meal and he puts in a handful or two.*

JOHN. Well, he is a gifted man!

SIBBY. It would be a great comfort to have a stone like that. [*She has finished plucking the chicken which lies in her lap.]*

TRAMP. And there’s another thing it does, ma’am, since it came into Catholic hands. If you put it into a pot of a Friday with a bit of the whitest meat in Ireland in it, it would turn it as black as black.

SIBBY. That is no less than a miracle. I must tell Father John about that.

TRAMP. But to put a bit of meat with it any other day of the week, it would do it no harm at all, but good. Look here now, ma'am, I'll put that nice little hen you have in your lap in the pot for a minute till you'll see. [*Takes it and puts it in.]*

JOHN *[sarcastically].* It's a good job this is not a Friday!

SIBBY. Keep yourself quiet, John, and don't be interrupting the talk or you'll get a knock on the head like the King of Loch- lann's grandmother.

JOHN. Go on, go on, I'll say no more.

TRAMP. If I'm passing this way some time of a Friday, I'll bring a nice bit of mutton, or the breast of a turkey, and you'll see how it will be no better in two minutes than a fistful of bog mould.

SIBBY *[getting up].* Let me take the chicken out now.

TRAMP. Stop till I'll help you, ma'am, you might scald your hand. I'll show it to you in a minute as white as your own skin, where the lily and the rose are fighting for mastery. Did you ever hear what the boys in your own parish were singing after you being married from them — such of them that had any voice at all and not choked with crying, or senseless with the drop of drink they took to comfort them and to keep their wits from going, with the loss of you.

[SIBBY *sits down again complacently.* SIBBY. Did they do that indeed? TRAMP. They did, ma'am, this is what they used to be singing:

Philomel, I've listened oft
To thy lay, near weeping willow —

No, that's not it — it's a queer thing the memory is —

'Twas at the dance at Dermody's, that first I caught a sight of her.

No, that's not it either — ah, now I have it.

My pretty Paistin is my heart's desire,
Yet I am shrunken to skin and bone.

SIBBY. Why would they call jme Paistin?

TRAMP. And why wouldn't they? Would you wish them to put your right name in a song, and your man ready to knock the brains of any man will as much as look your side of the road?

SIBBY. Well, maybe so.

TRAMP. I was standing by the man that made the song, and he writing it with an old bit of a carpenter's pencil, and the tears running down —

My pretty Paistin is my heart's desire,
Yet am I shrunken to skin and bone
For all my toil has had for its hire
Is drinking her health when lone, alone —

[SIBBY *takes a fork and rises to take out the chicken*. TRAMP *puts his hand to stop her and goes on:*

Oh I would think that I had my fee,
Though I am shrunken to bone and skin,
Could I but drink, my love on my knee
Between two barrels at the inn.

[SIBBY *half rises again*. TRAMP *puts his hand upon her hand.* TRAMP. Wait now till you hear the end *[sings]:*

Nine nights I lay in longing sore
Between two bushes under the rain;
Thinking to meet my love once more
I cried and whistled but vain, all vain.

[He repeats the verse, SIBBY *singing too and beating time with fork.]*

SIBBY *[to* JOHN]. I always knew I was too good for you! *[She goes on humming.]*

JOHN. Well, he has the poor woman bewitched.

SIBBY *[suddenly coming to her wits].* Did you take the chicken out yet?

TRAMP *[taking it out and giving it a good squeeze into the pot]*. I did, ma'am. Look at it there. *[He takes it and lays on table.* JOHN. How is the broth getting on? TRAMP *[tasting it with a spoon].* It's grand. It's always grand.

SIBBY. Give me a taste of it. TRAMP *[takes the pot off and slips the ham bone behind him]*. Give me some vessel till I'll give this sky-woman a taste of it.

[JOHN *gives him an egg-cup which he fills and gives to* SIBBY. JOHN *gives him a mug, and he fills this for himself, pouring it back and forward from the mug to a bowl that is on the table, and drinking gulps now and again,* SIBBY *blows at hers and smells it.*

SIBBY. There's a good smell on it anyway. *[Tasting.]* It's lovely. Oh, I'd give the world and all to have the stone that made that!

TRAMP. The world and all wouldn't buy- it, ma'am. If I was inclined to sell it the Lord Lieutenant would have given me Dublin Castle and all that's in it long ago.

SIBBY. Oh, couldn't we coax it out of you any way at all?

TRAMP [*drinking more soup].* The whole world wouldn't coax it out of me except maybe for one thing... [*looks depressed].* Now I think of it there's only one reason I might think of parting it at all.

SIBBY *[eagerly].* What reason is that?

TRAMP. It's a misfortune that overtakes me, ma'am, every time I make an attempt to keep a pot of my own to boil it in, and I don't like to be always under a compliment to the neighbours, asking the loan of one. But whatever way it is, I never can keep a pot with me. I had a right to ask one of the little man that gave me the stone. The last one I bought got the bottom burned out of it one night I was giving a hand to a friend that keeps a still, and the one before that I hid under a bush one time I was going into Ennis for the night, and some boys in the town dreamed about it and went looking for treasure in it, and they found nothing but eggshells, but they brought it away for all that. And another one....

SIBBY. Give me the loan of the stone itself, and I'll engage I'll keep a pot for it.... Wait now till I'll make some offer to you....

TRAMP *[aside],* I'd best not be stopping to bargain, the priest might be coming in on me. *[Gets up.]* Well, ma'am, I'm sorry I can't oblige you.

[Goes to door, shades his eyes and looks out, turns suddenly.] I have no time to lose, ma'am, I'm off. *[Comes to table and takes his hat.]* Well, ma'am, what offer will you make?

JOHN. You might as well leave it for a day on trial first.

TRAMP *[to* JOHN]. I think it likely I'll not be passing this way again. *[To* SIBBY] Well, now, ma'am, as you were so kind, and for the sake of the good treatment you gave me I'll ask nothing at all for it. Here it is for you and welcome, and that you may live long to use it. But I'll just take a little bit in my bag that'll do for my supper, for fear I mightn't be in Tubber before night. *[He takes up the chicken*.] And you won't begrudge me a drop of whisky when you can make plenty for yourself from this out. *[Takes the bottled]*

JOHN. You deserve it, you deserve it indeed. You are a very gifted man. Don't forget the kippeen!

TRAMP. It's here! *[Slaps his pocket and exit,* JOHN *follows him.]*

SIBBY [*looking at the stone in her hand]*. Broth of the best, stirabout, poteen, wine itself, he said! And the people that will be coming to see the miracle! I'll be as rich a£ Biddy Early before I die!

[JOHN *comes back.* SIBBY. Where were you, John?

JOHN. I just went out to shake him by the hand. He's a very gifted man.

SIBBY. He is so indeed.

JOHN. And the priest's at the top of the boreen coming for his dinner. Maybe you'd best put the stone in the pot again.

The King's Threshold

TO FRANK FAY

Because of his beautiful speaking in
the character of Seanchan

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

KING GUAIRE.
SEANCHAN *(pronounced* SHANAHAN).
HIS PUPILS.
THE MAYOR OF KINVARA.
TWO CRIPPLES.
BRIAN, *an old servant.*
THE LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN.
A SOLDIER.
A MONK.
COURT LADIES.
TWO PRINCESSES.
FEDELM.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

SCENE: *Steps before the Palace of* KING

GUAIRE *at Gort. A table or litter in front of steps at one side, with food on it, and a bench*. SEANCHAN *lying on steps*. PUPILS *before steps*. KING *on the upper step before a curtained door.*

KING. I welcome you that have the mastery
Of the two kinds of Music: the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instruments,
And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully, that all the Art's but Speech
Delighted with its own music; and you that carry
The long twisted horn, and understand
The heady notes that, being without words,
Can hurry beyond Time and Fate and Change.
For the high angels that drive the horse of Time —
The golden one by day, by night the silver —
Are not more welcome to one that loves the world
For some fair woman's sake.
I have called you hither
To save the life of your great master, Seanchan,
For all day long it has flamed up or flickered
To the fast cooling hearth.

OLDEST PUPIL. When did he sicken?
Is it a fever that is wasting him?

KING. NO fever or sickness. He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.

OLDEST PUPIL. My head whirls round;
I do not know what I am to think or say.
I owe you all obedience, and yet
How can I give it, when the man I have loved
More than all others, thinks that he is wronged
So bitterly, that he will starve and die
Rather than bear it? Is there any man
Will throw his life away for a light issue?

KING. It is but fitting that you take his side
Until you understand how light an issue
Has put us by the ears. Three days ago
I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers —
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law —
Who long had thought it against their dignity
For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At the great council of the state and share
In their authority. I bade him go,
Though at the first with kind and courteous words,

But when he pleaded for the poets' right,
Established at the establishment of the world,
I said that I was King, and that all rights
Had their original fountain in some king,
And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
Where there was the most honour. My courtiers —
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law —
Shouted approval; and amid that noise
Seanchan went out, and from that hour to this
Although there is good food and drink beside him,
Has eaten nothing.

OLDEST PUPIL. I can breathe again.
You have taken a great burden from my mind
For that old custom's not worth dying for.

KING. Persuade him to eat or drink. Till yesterday
I thought that hunger and weakness had been enough;
But finding them too trifling and too light
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave,
I called you hither, and all my hope's in you,
And certain of his neighbours and good friends
That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King; because if I gave way,
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it may be
The very throne be shaken.

OLDEST PUPIL. — I will persuade him.
Your words had been enough persuasion, King;
But being lost in sleep or reverie,
He cannot hear them.

KING. — Make him eat or drink.
Nor is it all because of my good name
I'd have him do it, for he is a man
That might well hit the fancy of a king,
Banished out of his country, or a woman's
Or any other's that can judge a man
For what he is. But I that sit a throne,
And take my measure from the needs of the State,
Call his wild thought that overruns the measure,
Making words more than deeds, and his proud will
That would unsettle all, most mischievous,
And he himself a most mischievous man.
[He turns to go, and then returns again.
Promise a house with grass and tillage land,
An annual payment, jewels and silken ware,
Or anything but that old right of the poets.
[He goes into palace.

OLDEST PUPIL. The King did wrong to abrogate our right;
But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,
Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan;
Waken out of your dream and look at us,
Who have ridden under the moon and all the day,

Until the moon has all but come again,
That we might be beside you.

SEANCHAN *[half turning round, leaning on his elbow, and speaking as if in a dream].*
I was but now
In Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,
With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast flesh
Rose round me, and I saw the roasting spits;
And then the dream was broken, and I saw
Grania dividing salmon by a stream.

OLDEST PUPIL. Hunger has made you
dream of roasting flesh;
And though I all but weep to think of it,
The hunger of the crane, that starves himself
At the full moon because he is afraid
Of his own shadow and the glittering water,
Seems to me little more fantastical
Than this of yours.

SEANCHAN. Why, that's the very truth.
It is as though the moon changed every-thing —
Myself and all that I can hear and see;
For when the heavy body has grown weak,
There's nothing that can tether the wild mind
That, being moonstruck and fantastical,
Goes where it fancies. I have even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the words

Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by.

OLDEST PUPIL. I am your oldest pupil, Seanchan;
The one that has been with you many years —
So many, that you said at Candlemas
That I had almost done with school, and knew
All but all that poets understand.

SEANCHAN. My oldest pupil? No, that cannot be,
For it is some one of the courtly crowds
That have been round about me from sunrise,
And I am tricked by dreams; but I'll refute them.
At Candlemas I bid that pupil tell me
Why poetry is honoured, wishing to know
If he had any weighty argument
For distant countries and strange, churlish kings.
What did he answer?

OLDEST PUPIL. — I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. But why must I stand here,
Repeating an old lesson, while you starve?

SEANCHAN. Tell on, for I begin to know the voice.
What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish?

OLDEST PUPIL. If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman,
That looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

SEANCHAN. — But that's not all:
For when I asked you how a man should guard
Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,
Comparing them to venerable things
God gave to men before he gave them wheat.

OLDEST PUPIL. I answered — and the word
was half your own —
That he should guard them as the Men of Dea
Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King guards
His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse
The jewel that is underneath his horn,
Pouring out life for it as one pours out
Sweet heady wine.... But now I under- stand;
You would refute me out of my own mouth;
And yet a place at council, near the King,
Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.
How does so light a thing touch poetry?
[SEANCHAN *is now sitting up. He still*
looks dreamily in front of him.

SEANCHAN. At Candlemas you called this poetry
One of the fragile, mighty things of God,

That die at an insult.

OLDEST PUPIL *[to other* PUPILS]. Give me
some true answer,
Upon that day he spoke about the Court
And called it the first comely child of the world,
And said that all that was insulted there
The world insulted, for the Courtly life
Is the world's model. How shall I answer him?
Can you not give me some true argument?
I will not tempt him with a lying one.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O, tell him that the
lovers of his music
Have need of him.

SEANCHAN. — But I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick o' time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have voices,
Even in anger, like the strings of harps;
And how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle?

YOUNGEST PUPIL [*throwing himself at* SEAN-

CHAN'S *feet].* Why did you take me from
my father's fields?
If you would leave me now, what shall I love?
Where shall I go? What shall I set my hand to?
And why have you put music in my ears,

If you would send me to the clattering houses?
I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
For how could I sing verses or make music
With none to praise me, and a broken heart?

SEANCHAN. What was it that the poets promised you,
If it was not their sorrow? Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are not you the youngest of my scholars?
And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.
And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
On these bare steps.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O master, do not die!

OLDEST PUPIL. Trouble him with no useless argument.
Be silent! There is nothing we can do
Except find out the King and kneel to him,
And beg our ancient right.
For here are some
To say whatever we could say and more,
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that is no use.
[Raises YOUNGEST PUPIL.
If it seem well that we beseech the King,
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the stones

In silence, and come with me silently.
Come with slow footfalls, and bow all your heads,
For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.
[They lay harps and trumpets down one
by one, and then go out very solemnly
and slowly, following one another.
Enter MAYOR, TWO CRIPPLES, *and*

BRIAN, *an old servant. The* MAYOR,
who has been heard, before he came
*"pon the stage, muttering '*Chief
Poet,"Ireland,' etc., *crosses in*
front of SEANCHAN *to the other side*
of the steps. BRIAN *takes food out of*
basket. The CRIPPLES *are watching*
the basket. The MAYOR *has an*
Ogham stick in his hand.

MAYOR *[as he crosses*]. 'Chief Poet,"Ireland,"Townsman,"Grazing land.'
Those are the words I have to keep in mind —
'Chief Poet,"Ireland,"Townsman,' 'Grazing land.'
I have the words. They are all upon the Ogham.
'Chief Poet," Ireland,"Townsman," Grazing land.'
But what's their order?
[He keeps muttering over his speech
during what follows.

FIRST CRIPPLE. The King were rightly served
If Seanchan drove his good luck away.

What's there about a king, that's in the world
From birth to burial like another man,
That he should change old customs, that were in it
As long as ever the world has been a world?

SECOND CRIPPLE. If I were king I would
not meddle with him,
For there is something queer about a poet.
I knew of one that would be making rhyme
Under a thorn at crossing of three roads.
He was as ragged as ourselves, and yet
He was no sooner dead than every thorn tree
From Inchy to Kiltartan withered away.

FIRST CRIPPLE. The King is but a fool!

MAYOR. — I am getting ready.

FIRST CRIPPLE. A poet has power from beyond the world,
That he may set our thoughts upon old times,
And lucky queens and little holy fish
That rise up every seventh year —

MAYOR. — Hush! hush!

FIRST CRIPPLE. To cure the crippled.

MAYOR. — I am half ready now.

BRIAN. There's not a mischief I'd be- grudge the King
If it were any other —

MAYOR. — Hush! I am ready.

BRIAN. That died to get it. I have
brought out the food,
And if my master will not eat of it,
I'll home and get provision for his wake,
For that's no great way off. Well, have your say,
But don't be long about it.

MAYOR [*goes close to* SEANCHAN]. Chief Poet of Ireland,
I am the Mayor of your own town Kinvara,
And I am come to tell you that the news
Of this great trouble with the King of Gort
Has plunged us in deep sorrow — part for you,
Our honoured townsman, part for our good town.
[Begins to hesitate; scratching his head.
But what comes now? Something about the King.

BRIAN. Get on! get on! The food is all set out.

MAYOR. Don't hurry me.

FIRST CRIPPLE. — Give us a taste of it.
He'll not begrudge it.

SECOND CRIPPLE. Let them that have their limbs
Starve if they will. We have to keep in mind
The stomach God has left us.

MAYOR. — Hush! I have it!
The King was said to be most friendly to us,

And we have reason, as you'll recollect,
For thinking that he was about to give
Those grazing lands inland we so much need,
Being pinched between the water and the stones.
Our mowers mow with knives between the stones;
The sea washes the meadows. You know well
We have asked nothing but what's reasonable.

SEANCHAN. Reason in plenty. Yellowy white hair,
A hollow face, and not too many teeth.
How comes it he has been so long in the world
And not found Reason out?
[While saying this he has turned half
round. He hardly looks at the

MAYOR.

BRIAN *[trying to pull* MAYOR *away].* What good is there
In telling him what he has heard all day I
I will set food before him.

MAYOR *[shoving* BRIAN *away].* Don't hurry me!
It's small respect you're showing to the town!
Get farther off! *[to* SEANCHAN]. We would
not have you think,
Weighty as these considerations are,
That they have been as weighty in our minds
As our desire that one we take much pride in,
A man that's been an honour to our town,
Should live and prosper; therefore we be- seech you

To give way in a matter of no moment,
A matter of mere sentiment — a trifle —
That we may always keep our pride in you.
[He finishes this speech with a pompous air, motions to BRIAN *to bring the food to* SEANCHAN, *and sits on seat.*

BRIAN. Master, Master, eat this! It's not king's food,
That's cooked for everybody and nobody.
Here's barley-bread out of your father's oven,
And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse, your honour;
It's wholesome, and has the good taste of the sea.
[Takes dulse in one hand and bread in other and presses them into SEAN-

CHAN'S *hands*. SEANCHAN *shows by his movement his different feeling to*

BRIAN.

FIRST CRIPPLE. He has taken it, and there'll be nothing left!

SECOND CRIPPLE. Nothing at all, he wanted his own sort.
What's honey to a cat, corn to a dog,
Or a green apple to a ghost in a churchyard?

SEANCHAN *[pressing food back into* BRIAN'S *hands].* Eat it yourself, for you have come a journey,
And it may be ate nothing on the way.

BRIAN. How could I eat it, and your honour starving!
It is your father sends it, and he cried
Because the stiffness that is in his bones
Prevented him from coming, and bade me tell you
That he is old, that he has need of you,
And that the people will be pointing at him,
And he not able to lift up his head,
If you should turn the King's favour away;
And he adds to it, that he cared you well,
And you in your young age, and that it's right
That you should care him now.

SEANCHAN *[who is now interested*]. And is that all?
What did my mother say!

BRIAN. — She gave no message;
For when they told her you had it in mind to starve,
Or get again the ancient right of the poets,
She said: 'No message can do any good.
He will not send the answer that you want.
We cannot change him.' And she went indoors,
Lay down upon the bed, and turned her face
Out of the light. And thereupon your father
Said: 'Tell him that his mother sends no message,
Albeit broken down and miserable.'
[A pause.
Here's pigeon's eggs from Duras, and these others
Were laid by your own hens.

SEANCHAN. She has sent no message.
Our mothers know us; they know us to the bone.
They knew us before birth, and that is why
They know us even better than the sweet- hearts
Upon whose breasts we have lain.
Go quickly! Go
And tell them that my mother is in the right.
There is no answer. Go and tell them that.
Go tell them that she knew me.

MAYOR. — What is he saying?
I never understood a poet's talk
More than the baa of a sheep!
[Comes over from seat. SEANCHAN *turns away.*
You have not heard,
It may be, having been so much away,
How many of the cattle died last winter
From lacking grass, and that there was much sickness
Because the poor have nothing but salt fish
To live on through the winter?

BRIAN. — Get away,
And leave the place to me! It's my turn now,
For your sack's empty!

MAYOR. — Is it 'get away '!
Is that the way I'm to be spoken to!
Am I not Mayor? Aren't I authority?
Amn't I in the King's place? Answer me that!

BRIAN. Then show the people what a king
is like:
Pull down old merings and root custom up,
Whitewash the dunghills, fatten hogs and geese,
Hang your gold chain about an ass's neck,
And burn the blessed thorn trees out of the fields,
And drive what's comely away!

MAYOR. — Holy Saint Coleman!

FIRST CRIPPLE. Fine talk! fine talk!
What else does the King do?
He fattens hogs and hunts the wise man out.

SECOND CRIPPLE. He fattens geese.

FIRST CRIPPLE. And drives away the swan.

MAYOR. How dare you take his name into your mouth!
How dare you lift your voice against the
King!
What would we be without him?

BRIAN. — Why do you praise him?
I will have nobody speak well of him,
Or any other king that robs my master.

MAYOR. And had he not the right to? and the right
To strike your master's head off, being the King,
Or yours or mine? I say, * Long live the
King!

Because he does not take our heads from us.'
Call out, 'Long life to him!'

BRIAN. — Call out for him!
[Speaking at same time with MAYOR.
There's nobody'll call out for him,
But smiths will turn their anvils,
The millers turn their wheels,
The farmers turn their churns,
The witches turn their thumbs,
Till he be broken and splintered into pieces.

MAYOR *[at same time with* BRIAN]. He
might, if he'd a mind to it,
Be digging out our tongues,
Or dragging out our hair,
Or bleaching us like calves,
Or weaning us like lambs,
But for the kindness and the softness that is
in him. — *[They gasp for breath.*

FIRST CRIPPLE. I'll curse him till I drop!
[Speaking at same time as SECOND

CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN,
who have begun again.
The curse of the poor be upon him,
The curse of the widows upon him,
The curse of the children upon him,

The curse of the bishops upon him,
Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom!

SECOND CRIPPLE [*speaking at same time as*

FIRST CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN].
The curse of wrinkles be upon him!
Wrinkles where his eyes are,
Wrinkles where his nose is,
Wrinkles where his mouth is,
And a little old devil looking out of every wrinkle!

BRIAN [S*peaking at same time with* MAYOR
and CRIPPLES]. And nobody will sing for him,
And nobody will hunt for him,
And nobody will fish for him,
And nobody will pray for him,
But ever and always curse him and abuse him.

MAYOR [*speaking at same time with* CRIPPLES
and BRIAN]. What good is in a poet?
Has he money in a stocking,
Or cider in the cellar,
Or flitches in the chimney,
Or anything anywhere but his own idleness?
[BRIAN *seizes* MAYOR.
Help! help! Am I not in authority?

BRIAN. That's how I'll shout for the King!

MAYOR. Help! help 1 Am I not in the
King's place?

BRIAN. I'll teach him to be kind to the poor!

MAYOR. Help! help! Wait till we are in
Kinvara!

FIRST CRIPPLE [*beating* MAYOR *on the legs with crutch*]. I'll shake the royalty out of his legs!

SECOND CRIPPLE *[burying his nails in*

MAYOR'S *face],* I'll scrumble the ermine
out of his skin 1
['The CHAMBERLAIN *comes down steps shoutings* "Silence! silence!
silence!"

CHAMBERLAIN. How dare you make this
"proar at the doors.
Deafening the very greatest in the land,
As if the farmyards and the rookeries
Had all been emptied!

FIRST CRIPPLE. It is the Chamberlain.
[CRIPPLES *go out.*

CHAMBERLAIN. Pick up the litter there,
and get you gone!
Be quick about it! Have you no respect

For this worn stair, this all but sacred door,
Where suppliants and tributary kings
Have passed, and the world's glory knelt in silence?
Have you no reverence for what all other men
Hold honourable?

BRIAN. — If I might speak my mind,
I'd say the King would have his luck again
If he would let my master have his rights.

CHAMBERLAIN. Pick up your litter! Take your noise away!
Make haste, and get the clapper from the bell!

BRIAN *[gutting last of food into basket].*
What do the great and powerful care for rights
That have no armies!
[CHAMBERLAIN *begins shoving them out with his staff,*

MAYOR. My lord, I am not to blame.
I'm the King's man, and they attacked me for it.

BRIAN. We have our prayers, our curses and our prayers,
And we can give a great name or a bad one.
[MAYOR *is shoving* BRIAN *out before him*
with one hand, He keeps his face
to CHAMBERLAIN, *and keeps bowing.*
The CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with his staff,*

MAYOR. We could not make the poet eat, my lord.
[CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with his staff.*

Much honoured *[is shoved again]* — honoured
to speak with you, my lord;
But I'll go find the girl that he's to marry.
She's coming, but I'll hurry her, my lord.
Between ourselves, my lord *[is shoved again*
she is a great coaxer.
Much honoured, my lord. Oh, she's the girl to do it;
For when the intellect is out, my lord,
Nobody but a woman's any good.
[Is shoved again.
Much honoured, my lord *[is shoved again],*
much honoured, much honoured!
[Is shoved out, shoving BRIAN *out before him*
[All through this scene, from the outset of
the quarrel, SEANCHAN *has kept his*
face turned away, or hidden in his
cloak. While the CHAMBERLAIN *has*
been speaking., the SOLDIER *and the*

MONK *have come out of the palace.*
The MONK *stands on top of steps at*
one side, SOLDIER *a little down steps*
at the other side. COURT LADIES *are*
seen at opening in the palace curtain
behind SOLDIER, CHAMBERLAIN *is in the centre.*

CHAMBERLAIN *[to* SEANCHAN]. Well, you
must be contented, for your work
Has roused the common sort against the King,

And stolen his authority. The State
Is like some orderly and reverend house,
Wherein the master, being dead of a sudden,
The servants quarrel where they have a mind to,
And pilfer here and there.
[Pause, finding that SEANCHAN *does not answer.*
How many days
Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,
And the King's nobles, and myself, and all,
Who'd gladly be your friends, if you would
let them? — [*Going near to* MONK.
If you would try, you might persuade him, father.
I cannot make him answer me, and yet
If fitting hands would offer him the food,
He might accept it.

MONK. — Certainly I will not.
I've made too many homilies, wherein
The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished
Who will obey?

CHAMBERLAIN *[going to other side towards*

SOLDIER]. If you would speak to him,
You might not find persuasion difficult,
With all the devils of hunger helping you.

SOLDIER. I will not interfere, and if he starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
‘Tis but good riddance.

CHAMBERLAIN. One of us must do it.
It might be, if you’d reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion
That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or the King’s house, we’d be as little thought of
As summer linen when the winter’s come.

FIRST GIRL. But it would be the greater compliment
If Peter’d do it.

SECOND GIRL. Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat; he’s such a bag of bones!

SOLDIER. I’ll never trust a woman’s word again!
There’s nobody that was so loud against him
When he was at the council; now the wind’s changed,
And you that could not bear his speech or his silence,
Would have him there in his old place again;
I do believe you would, but I won’t help you.

SECOND GIRL. Why will you be so hard “pon us, Peter?
You know we have turned the common sort against us.
And he looks miserable.

FIRST GIRL. — We cannot dance, \
Because no harper will pluck a string for us.

SECOND GIRL. I cannot sleep with think- ing of his face.

FIRST GIRL. And I love dancing more than anything.

SECOND GIRL. Do not be hard on us; but yesterday
A woman in the road threw stones at me.
You would not have me stoned?

FIRST GIRL. — May I not dance?

SOLDIER. I will do nothing. You have put him out,
And now that he is out — well, leave him out.

FIRST GIRL. DO it for my sake, Peter.

SECOND GIRL. — And for mine.
[Each girl as she speaks takes PETER'S
hand with her right hand, stroking
down his arm with her left. While

SECOND GIRL *is stroking his arm,*

FIRST GIRL *leaves go and gives him the dish.*

SOLDIER. Well, well; but not your way.
[To SEANCHAN.] — Here's meat for you.
It has been carried from too good a table
For men like you, and I am offering it
Because these women have made a fool of me.
[A pause.
You mean to starve? You will have none of it?

I'll leave it there, where you can sniff the savour.
Snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself!
But if I were the King, I'd make you do it
With wisps of lighted straw.

SEANCHAN. YOU have rightly named me.
I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns
That are upon the edge of those great waters
Where all things vanish away, and I have heard
Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.
I am out of life; I am rolled up, and yet,
Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll
For you, King's dog! Go to the King, your master.
Crouch down and wag your tail, for it may be
He has nothing now against you, and I think
The stripes of your last beating are all healed.
[The SOLDIER *has drawn his sword.*

CHAMBERLAIN [*striking up sword*]. Put up
your sword, sir; put it up, I say!
The common sort would tear you into pieces
If you but touched him.

SOLDIER. — If he's to be flattered,
Petted, cajoled, and dandled into humour,
We might as well have left him at the table.
[Goes to one side sheathing sword.

SEANCHAN. You must need keep your
patience yet awhile,

For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air
To swallow before I have grown to be as civil
As any other dust.

CHAMBERLAIN. YOU wrong us, Seanchan.
There is none here but holds you in respect;
And if you'd only eat out of this dish,
The King would show how much he honours you.
[Bowing and smiling.
Who could imagine you'd so take to heart
Being driven from the council? I am certain
That you, if you will only think it over,
Will understand that it is men of law,
Leaders of the King's armies, and the like,
That should sit there.

SEANCHAN. Somebody has deceived you,
Or maybe it was your own eyes that lied,
In making it appear that I was driven
From the great council. You have driven away
The images of them that weave a dance
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.

CHAMBERLAIN. You mean we have driven poetry away.
But that's not altogether true, for I,
As you should know, have written poetry.
And often when the table has been cleared,
And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
And I repeat it him. My poetry

Is not to be compared with yours; but still,
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured —
In some measure.

SEANCHAN. — If you are a poet,
Cry out that the King's money would not buy,
Nor the high circle consecrate his head,
If poets had never christened gold, and even
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey- faced metal,
Precious; and cry out that none alive
Would ride among the arrows with high heart,
Or scatter with an open hand, had not
Our heady craft commended wasteful virtues.
And when that story's finished, shake your coat
Where little jewels gleam on it, and say,
A herdsman, sitting where the pigs had trampled,
Made up a song about enchanted kings,
Who were so finely dressed, one fancied them
All fiery, and women by the churn
And children by the hearth caught up the song
And murmured it, until the tailors heard it.

CHAMBERLAIN. If you would but eat some-
thing you'd find out.
That you have had these thoughts from lack of food,
For hunger makes us feverish.

SEANCHAN. — Cry aloud,
That when we are driven out we come again

Like a great wind that runs out of the waste
To blow the tables flat; and thereupon
Lie down upon the threshold till the King
Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.

MONK. You cannot shake him. I will to the King,
And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die.
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him.

FIRST GIRL. ‘Twas you that stirred it up.
You stirred it up that you might spoil our dancing.
Why shouldn’t we have dancing? We’re not in Lent.
Yet nobody will pipe or play to us;
And they will never do it if he die.
And that is why you are going.

MONK. — What folly’s this?

FIRST GIRL. Well, if you did not do it, speak
to him —
Use your authority; make him obey you.
What harm is there in dancing?

MONK. — Hush! begone!
Go to the fields and watch the hurley players,
Or any other place you have a mind to.
This is not woman’s work.

FIRST GIRL. — Come! let’s away!
We can do nothing here.

MONK. — The pride of the poets!
Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise,
And King and Church neglected. Seanchan,
I’ll take my leave, for you are perishing
Like all that let the wanton imagination
Carry them where it will, and it’s not likely
I’ll look upon your living face again.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer, nearer!

MONK. — Have you some last wish?

SEANCHAN. Stoop down, for I would
whisper it in your ear.
Has that wild God of yours, that was so wild
When you’d but lately taken the King’s pay,
Grown any tamer? He gave you all much trouble.

MONK. Let go my habit!

SEANCHAN. Have you persuaded him
To chirp between two dishes when the King
Sits down to table?

MONK. — Let go my habit, sir!
[Crosses to centre of stage.

SEANCHAN. And maybe he has learned to
sing quite softly
Because loud singing would disturb the King,
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends
After the table has been cleared. Not yet!
[SEANCHAN *has been dragged some feet*
clinging to the MONK'S *habit.*
You did not think that hands so full of hunger
Could hold you tightly. They are not civil yet.
I'd know if you have taught him to eat bread
From the King's hand, and perch upon his finger.
I think he perches on the King's strong hand.
But it may be that he is still too wild.
You must not weary in your work; a king
Is often weary, and he needs a God
To be a comfort to him.
[The MONK *plucks his habit away and*
goes into palace. SEANCHAN *holds*
"p his hand as if a bird perched upon
it. He pretends to stroke the bird.
A little God,
With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.

FIRST GIRL. There will be no more dancing in our time,
For nobody will play the harp or the fiddle.
Let us away, for we cannot amend it,
And watch the hurley.

SECOND GIRL. Hush! he is looking at us.

SEANCHAN. Yes, yes, go to the hurley, go to the hurley,
Go to the hurley! Gather up your skirts —
Run quickly! You can remember many love songs;
I know it by the light that's in your eyes —
But you'll forget them. You're fair to look
"pon.
Your feet delight in dancing, and your mouths
In the slow smiling that awakens love.
The mothers that have borne you mated rightly.
They'd little ears as thirsty as your ears
For many love songs. Go to the young men.
Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?
Go from me! Here is nothing for your eyes.
But it is I that am singing you away —
Singing you to the young men.
[The TWO YOUNG PRINCESSES *come out of palace. While he has been speaking the* GIRLS *have shrunk back holding each other's hands.*

FIRST GIRL. — Be quiet!
Look who it is has come out of the house.
Princesses, we are for the hurling field.
Will you go there?

FIRST PRINCESS. We will go with you,
Aileen.

But we must have some words with Seanchan,
For we have come to make him eat and drink.

CHAMBERLAIN. I will hold out the dish and cup for him
While you are speaking to him of his folly,
If you desire it, Princess.
[He has taken dish and cup.

FIRST PRINCESS. — NO, Finula
Will carry him the dish and I the cup.
We'll offer them ourselves.
[They take cup and dish.

FIRST GIRL. — They are so gracious;
The dear little Princesses are so gracious.
[PRINCESS *holds out her hand for*

SEANCHAN *to kiss it. He does not move.*
Although she is holding out her hand to him,
He will not kiss it.

FIRST PRINCESS. My father bids us say
That, though he cannot have you at his table,
You may ask any other thing you like
And he will give it you. We carry you
With our own hands a dish and cup of wine.

FIRST GIRL. Oh, look! he has taken it!
He has taken it!
The dear Princesses! I have always said

That nobody could refuse them anything.
[SEANCHAN *takes the cup in one hand.*
In the other he holds for a moment
the hand of the PRINCESS,

SEANCHAN. Oh long, soft fingers and pale
finger-tips,
Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand!
Oh, you have fair white hands, for it is certain
There is uncommon whiteness in these hands.
But there is something comes into my mind,
Princess. A little while before your birth,
I saw your mother sitting by the road
In a high chair; and when a leper passed,
She pointed him the way into the town.
He lifted up his hand and blessed her hand —
I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your hands;
I will find out if they are contaminated,
For it has come into my thoughts that maybe
The King has sent me food and drink by hands
That are contaminated. I would see all your hands.
You've eyes of dancers; but hold out your hands,
For it may be there are none sound among you.
[The PRINCESSES *have shrunk back in terror.*

FIRST PRINCESS. He has called us lepers.
[SOLDIER *draws sword.*

CHAMBERLAIN. He’s out of his mind,
And does not know the meaning of what he said.

SEANCHAN [*standing up.]* There’s no sound
hand among you — no sound hand.
Away with you! away with all of you!
You are all lepers! There is leprosy
Among the plates and dishes that you have carried.
And wherefore have you brought me leper’s wine?
[He flings the contents of the cup in their faces.
There, there! I have given it to you again.
And now
Begone, or I will give my curse to you.
You have the leper’s blessing, but you think
Maybe the bread will something lack in savour
Unless you mix my curse into the dough.
[They go out hurriedly in all directions.

SEANCHAN *is staggering in the middle of the stage.*
Where did I say the leprosy had come from?
I said it came out of a leper’s hand,
[Enter CRIPPLES.
And that he walked the highway. But that’s folly,
For he was walking up there in the sky.
And there he is even now, with his white hand
Thrust out of the blue air, and blessing them
With leprosy.

FIRST CRIPPLE. He's pointing at the moon
That's coming out up yonder, and he calls it
Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

SEANCHAN. He's holding up his hand
above them all —
King, noblemen, princesses — blessing all.
Who could imagine he'd have so much patience?

FIRST CRIPPLE [*clutching the other* CRIPPLE].
Come out of this!

SECOND CRIPPLE *[pointing to food].* If you
don't need it, sir,
May we not carry some of it away?
[They cross towards food and pass in
front of SEANCHAN.

SEANCHAN. Who's speaking? Who are you?

FIRST CRIPPLE. — Come out of this!

SECOND CRIPPLE. Have pity on us, that
must beg our bread
From table to table throughout the entire world,
And yet be hungry.

SEANCHAN. But why were you born crooked?
What bad poet did your mothers listen to
That you were born so crooked?

CRIPPLE. — Come away!
Maybe he’s cursed the food, and it might kill
“s.

OTHER CRIPPLE. Yes, better come away.
[They go out.

SEANCHAN *[staggering and speaking wearily].*
He has great strength
And great patience to hold his right hand there,
Uplifted, and not wavering about.
He is much stronger than I am, much stronger.
[Sinks down on steps. MAYOR *and*

FEDELM *have entered.*

MAYOR. He is delirious now.

FEDELM. — Before I speak
Of food or drink I’ll take him out of this.
For while he is on this threshold and can hear,
It may be, the voices that made mock of him,
He would not listen.

MAYOR. — No, speak to him at once.
Press food upon him while delirious
And he may eat not knowing what he does.
[MAYOR *goes out.*

FEDELM. Seanchan! Seanchan!
[He remains looking into the sky.

Can you not hear me, Seanchan?
It is myself.
[He looks at her, dreamily at first, then takes her hand.

SEANCHAN. Is this your hand, Fedelm?
I have been looking at another hand
That is up yonder.

FEDELM. — I have come for you.

SEANCHAN. Fedelm, I did not know that you were here.

FEDELM. And can you not remember that
I promised
That I would come and take you home with me
When I'd the harvest in? And now I've come,
And you must come away, and come on the instant.

SEANCHAN. Yes, I will come. But is the harvest in?
This air has got a summer taste in it.

FEDELM. But is not the wild middle of the summer
A better time to marry? Come with me now!

SEANCHAN *[seizing her by both wrists*]. Who
taught you that? For it's a certainty,
Although I never knew it till last night,
That marriage, because it is the height of life,
Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake:
There had come a frenzy into the light of the stars,

And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry
Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.
But some that are within there made a noise,
And frighted them away.

FEDELM. — Come with me now!
We have far to go, and daylight's running out.

SEANCHAN. The stars had come so near me that I caught
Their singing. It was praise of that great race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white- bodied,
With a high head, and open hand, and how,
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the world.

FEDELM. But you will tell me all about their songs
When we're at home. You have need of rest and care,
And I can give them you when we're at home.
And therefore let us hurry, and get us home.

SEANCHAN. It's certain that there is some trouble here,
Although it's gone out of my memory.
And I would get away from it. Give me
your help. — [*Trying to rise.*
But why are not my pupils here to help me?
Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.

FEDELM. Come with me now, and I will send for them,
For I have a great room that's full of beds

I can make ready; and there is a smooth lawn
Where they can play at hurley and sing poems
Under an apple-tree.

SEANCHAN. — I know that place:
An apple-tree, and a smooth level lawn
Where the young men can sway their hurley sticks.
[Sings.]

The four rivers that run there,
Through well-mown level ground,
Have come out of a blessed well
That is all bound and wound
By the great roots of an apple,
And all the fowl of the air
Have gathered in the wide branches
And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes with her hands.*

FEDELM. No, there are not four rivers, and those rhymes
Praise Adam's paradise.

SEANCHAN. — I can remember now,
It's out of a poem I made long ago
About the Garden in the East of the World,
And how spirits in the images of birds
Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab- tree.
They come before me now, and dig in the fruit
With so much gluttony, and are so drunk

With that harsh wholesome savour, that their feathers
Are clinging one to another with the juice.
But you would lead me to some friendly place,
And I would go there quickly.

FEDELM *[helping him to rise*]. Come with me.
[He walks slowly, supported by her, till
he comes to table.

SEANCHAN. But why am I so weak? Have
I been ill?
Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak?
[Sinks on to seat.

FEDELM *[goes to table*]. I'll dip this piece of
bread into the wine,
For that will make you stronger for the journey.

SEANCHAN. Yes, give me bread and wine;
that's what I want,
For it is hunger that is gnawing me.
[He takes bread from FEDELM, *hesitates,*
and then thrusts it back into her hand.
But, no; I must not eat it.

FEDELM. — Eat, Seanchan.
For if you do not eat it you will die.

SEANCHAN. Why did you give me food?
Why did you come?

For had I not enough to fight against
Without your coming?

FEDELM. — Eat this little crust,
Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

SEANCHAN. I must not eat it — but that's beyond your wit.
Child! child! I must not eat it, though I die.

FEDELM *{passionately*]. You do not know
what love is; for if you loved,
You would put every other thought away.
But you have never loved me.

SEANCHAN *[seizing her by wrist].* You, a child,
Who have but seen a man out of the window,
Tell me that I know nothing about love,
And that I do not love you? Did I not say
There was a frenzy in the light of the stars
All through the livelong night, and that the night
Was full of marriages? But that fight's over
And all that's done with, and I have to die.

FEDELM [*throwing her arms about him*]. I
will not be put from you, although I think
I had not grudged it you if some great lady,
If the King's daughter, had set out your bed.
I will not give you up to death; no, no!
And are not these white arms and this soft neck
Better than the brown earth?

SEANCHAN [*struggling to disengage himself].*
Begone from me!
There's treachery in those arms and in that voice.
They're all against me. Why do you linger there?
How long must I endure the sight of you?

FEDELM. O, Seanchan! Seanchan!

SEANCHAN *[rising].* Go where you will,
So it be out of sight and out of mind.
I cast you from me like an old torn cap,
A broken shoe, a glove without a finger,
A crooked penny; whatever is most worth- less.

FEDELM *[bursts into tears],* Oh, do not
drive me from you!

SEANCHAN *[takes her in his arms'].* What did I say,
My dove of the woods? I was about to curse you.
It was a frenzy. I'll unsay it all.
But you must go away.

FEDELM. — Let me be near you.
I will obey like any married wife.
Let me but lie before your feet.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer. *[Kisses her.*
If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,
The kiss of multitudes in times to come
Had been the poorer.

[Enter KING *from palace, followed by*
the two PRINCESSES.

KING *[to* FEDELM]. Has he eaten yet?

FEDELM. NO, King, and will not till you have restored
The right of the poets.

KING *[coming down and standing before*

SEANCHAN]. Seanchan, you have refused
Everybody I have sent, and now
I come to you myself.

FEDELM. — Come nearer, King,
He is now so weak he cannot hear your voice.

KING. Seanchan, put away your pride as I
Have put my pride away. I had your love
Not a great while ago, and now you have planned
To put a voice by every cottage fire,
And in the night when no one sees who cries,
To cry against me till my throne has crumbled.
And yet if I give way I must offend
My courtiers and nobles till they, too,
Strike at the crown. What would you have of me?

SEANCHAN. When did the poets promise safety, King?

KING. Seanchan, I bring you bread in my own hands,
And bid you eat because of all these reasons,

And for this further reason, that I love you.
[SEANCHAN -*pushes bread away, with*

FEDELM'S *hand.*
You have refused, Seanchan?

SEANCHAN. — We have refused it.

KING. I have been patient, though I am a king,
And have the means to force you. But that's ended,
And I am but a king, and you a subject.
Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither;
[Enter COURT LADIES, MONK, SOLDIERS,

CHAMBERLAIN, *and* COURTIERS *with*

PUPILS, *who have halters round their necks.*
For you can have your way. I that was man,
With a man's heart, am now all king again,
Speak to your master; beg your life of him;
Show him the halter that is round your necks.
If his heart's set upon it, he may die;
But you shall all die with him.
[Goes up steps.
Beg your lives!
Begin, for you have little time to lose.
Begin it, you that are the oldest pupil.

OLDEST PUPIL. Die, Seanchan, and pro-
claim the right of the poets.

KING. Silence! you are as crazy as your master.
But that young boy, that seems the youngest of you
I'd have him speak. Kneel down before him, boy;
Hold up your hands to him that you may pluck
That milky-coloured neck out of the noose.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. Die, Seanchan, and pro-
claim the right of the poets.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer me that I may know how face
Differs from face and touch you with my hands.
O more than kin, O more than children could be,
For children are but born out of our blood
And share our frailty. O my chicks, my chicks!
That I have nourished underneath my wings
And fed upon my soul.
[He rises and walks down steps.
I need no help.
He needs no help that joy has lifted up
Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekiel.
The man that dies has the chief part in the story,
And I will mock and mock that image yonder,
That evil picture in the sky — no, no!
I have all my strength again, I will outface it.
O look upon the moon that's standing there
In the blue daylight — take note of the com- plexion
Because it is the white of leprosy
And the contagion that afflicts mankind
Falls from the moon. When I and these are dead

We should be carried to some windy hill
To lie there with uncovered face awhile
That mankind and that leper there may know
Dead faces laugh.
[He falls and then half rises.
King! King! Dead faces laugh.
[He dies.

OLDEST PUPIL. King, he is dead; some
strange triumphant thought
So filled his heart with joy that it has burst,
Being grown too mighty for our frailty,
And we who gaze grow like him and abhor
The moments that come between us and that death
You promised us.

KING. — Take up his body.
Go where you please and lay it where you please,
So that I cannot see his face or any
That cried him towards his death.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. Dead faces laugh!
The ancient right is gone, the new remains
And that is death.
[They go towards the King holding out their halters.
We are impatient men,
So gather up the halters in your hands.

KING. Drive them away.
[He goes into the palace. The SOLDIERS

block the way before the PUPILS,

SOLDIER. — Here is no place for you.
For he and his pretensions now are finished.
Begone before the men-at-arms are bidden
To beat you from the door.

OLDEST PUPIL. — Take up his body
And cry that driven from the populous door
He seeks high waters and the mountain birds
To claim a portion of their solitude.
[They make a litter with cloak and
staffs or use one discovered, heaped
with foody at the opening of the play.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. And cry that when they
took his ancient right
They took all common sleep; therefore he claims
The mountain for his mattress and his pillow.

OLDEST PUPIL. And there he can sleep on, not noticing,
Although the world be changed from worse to worse,
Amid the changeless clamour of the curlew.
[They raise the Utter on their shoulders
and move a few steps.

YOUNGEST PUPIL *[motioning to them to stop*
Yet make triumphant music; sing aloud
For coming times will bless what he has blessed
And curse what he has cursed.

OLDEST PUPIL. — NO, no, be still,
Or pluck a solemn music from the strings
You wrong his greatness speaking so of triumph.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O silver trumpets, be you lifted up
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long-throated swans upon the v/aves of time,
Sing loudly for beyond the wall of the world
That race may hear our music and awake.

OLDEST PUPIL *[motioning the musicians to lower their trumpets*]. Not what it leaves
behind it in the light
But what it carries with it to the dark
Exalts the soul; nor song nor trumpet blast
Can call up races from the worsening world
To mend the wrong and mar the solitude
Of the great shade we follow to the tomb.
[FEDELM *and the* PUPILS *go out carrying the litter. Some play a mournful music.*

On Baile's Strand

PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

CUCHULLAIN, the King of Muirthemne.

CONCOBAR, the High King of Ullad.

DAIRE, a King.

FINTAIN, a blind man.

BARACH, a fool.

A Young Man.

Young Kings and Old Kings.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

SCENE: A great hall by the sea close to Dundalgan. There are two great chairs on either side of the hall, each raised a little from the ground, and on the back of the one chair is carved and painted a woman with a fish's tail, and on the back of the other a hound. There are smaller chairs and benches raised in tiers round the walls. There is a great ale vat at one side near a small door, & a large door at the back through which one can see the sea. Barach, a tall thin man with long ragged hair, dressed in skins, comes in at the side door. He is leading Fintain, a fat blind man, who is somewhat older.

BARACH.

I will shut the door, for this wind out of the sea gets into my bones, and if I leave but an inch for the wind there is one like a flake of sea-frost that might come into the house.

FINTAIN.

What is his name, fool?

BARACH.

It's a woman from among the Riders of the Sidhe. It's Boann herself from the river. She has left the Dagda's bed, and gone through the salt of the sea & up here to the strand of Baile, and all for love of me. Let her keep her husband's bed, for she'll have none of me. Nobody knows how lecherous these goddesses are. I see her in every kind of shape but oftener than not she's in the wind and cries 'give a kiss and put your arms about me.' But no,

she'll have no more of me. Yesterday when I put out my lips to kiss her, there was nothing there but the wind. She's bad, Fintain. O, she's bad. I had better shut the big door too. (He is going towards the big door but turns hearing Fintain's voice.)

FINTAIN.

(Who has been feeling about with his stick.) What's this and this?

BARACH.

They are chairs.

FINTAIN.

And this?

BARACH.

Why, that's a bench.

FINTAIN.

And this?

BARACH.

A big chair.

FINTAIN.

(Feeling the back of the chair.) There is a sea-woman carved upon it.

BARACH.

And there is another big chair on the other side of the hall.

FINTAIN.

Lead me to it. (He mutters while the fool is leading him.) That is what the High King Concobar has on his shield. The High King will be coming. They have brought out his chair. (He begins feeling the back of the other chair.) And there is a dog's head on this. They have brought out our master's chair. Now I know what the horse-boys were talking about. We must not stay here. The Kings are going to meet here. Now that Concobar and our master, that is his chief man, have put down all the enemies of Ullad, they are going to build up Emain again. They are going to talk over their plans for building it. Were you ever in Concobar's town before it was burnt? O, he is a great King, for though Emain was burnt down, every war had made him richer. He has gold and silver dishes, and chessboards and candle-sticks made of precious stones. Fool, have they taken the top from the ale vat?

BARACH.

They have.

FINTAIN.

Then bring me a horn of ale quickly, for the Kings will be here in a minute. Now I can listen. Tell me what you saw this morning?

BARACH.

About the young man and the fighting?

FINTAIN.

Yes.

BARACH.

And after that we can go and eat the fowl, for I am hungry.

FINTAIN.

Time enough, time enough. You're in as great a hurry as when you brought me to Aine's Seat, where the mad dogs gather when the moon's at the full. Go on with your story.

BARACH.

I was creeping under a ditch, with the fowl in my leather bag, keeping to the shore where the farmer could not see me, when I came upon a ship drawn up upon the sands, a great red ship with a woman's head upon it.

FINTAIN.

A ship out of Aoife's country. They have all a woman's head on the bow.

BARACH.

There was a young man with a pale face and red hair standing beside it. Some of our people came up whose turn it was to guard the shore. I heard them ask the young man his name. He said he was under bonds not to tell it. Then words came between them, and they fought, & the young man killed half of them, and the others ran away.

FINTAIN.

It matters nothing to us, but he has come at last.

BARACH.

Who has come?

FINTAIN.

I know who that young man is. There is not another like him in the world. I saw him when I had my eyesight.

BARACH.

You saw him?

FINTAIN.

I used to be in Aoife's country when I had my eyesight.

BARACH.

That was before you went on shipboard and were blinded for putting a curse on the wind?

FINTAIN.

Queen Aoife had a son that was red haired and pale faced like herself, and everyone said that he would kill Cuchullain some day, but I would not have that spoken of.

BARACH.

Nobody could do that. Who was his father?

FINTAIN.

Nobody but Aoife knew that, not even he himself.

BARACH.

Not even he himself! Was Aoife a goddess & lecherous?

FINTAIN.

I overheard her telling that she never had but one lover, and that he was the only man who overcame her in battle. There were some who thought him one of the Riders of the Sidhe, because the child was great of limb and strong beyond others. The child was begotten over the mountains; but come nearer and I will tell you something.

BARACH.

You have thought something?

FINTAIN.

When I hear the young girls talking about the colour of Cuchullain's eyes, & how they have seven colours, I have thought about it. That young man has Aoife's face and hair, but he has Cuchullain's eyes.

BARACH.

How can he have Cuchullain's eyes?

FINTAIN.

He is Cuchullain's son.

BARACH.

And his mother has sent him hither to fight his father.

FINTAIN.

It is all quite plain. Cuchullain went into Aoife's country when he was a young man that he might learn skill in arms, and there he became Aoife's lover.

BARACH.

And now she hates him because he went away, and has sent the son to kill the father. I knew she was a goddess.

FINTAIN.

And she never told him who his father was, that he might do it. I have thought it all out, fool. I know a great many things because I listen when nobody is noticing and I keep my wits awake. What ails you now?

BARACH.

I have remembered that I am hungry.

FINTAIN.

Well, forget it again, and I will tell you about Aoife's country. It is full of wonders. There are a great many Queens there who can change themselves into wolves and into swine and into white hares, and when they are in their own shapes they are stronger than almost any man; and there are young men there who have cat's eyes and if a bird chirrup or a mouse squeak they cannot keep them shut even though it is bedtime and they sleepy; and listen, for this is a great wonder, a very great wonder, there is a long narrow bridge, and when anybody goes to cross it, that the Queens do not like, it flies up as this bench would if you were to sit on the end of it. Everybody who goes there to learn skill in arms has to cross it. It was in that country too that Cuchullain got his spear made out of dragon bones. There were two dragons fighting in the foam of the sea, & their grandam was the moon, and six Queens came along the shore.

BARACH.

I won't listen to your story.

FINTAIN.

It is a very wonderful story. Wait till you hear what the six Queens did. Their right hands were all made of silver.

BARACH.

No, I will have my dinner first. You have eaten the fowl I left in front of the fire. The last time you sent me to steal something you made me forget all about it till you had eaten it up.

FINTAIN.

No, there is plenty for us both.

BARACH.

Come with me where it is.

FINTAIN.

(Who is being led towards the door at the back by Barach.) O, it is all right, it is in a safe place.

BARACH.

It is a fine fowl. It was the biggest in the yard.

FINTAIN.

It had a good smell, but I hope that the wild dogs have not smelt it. (Voices are heard outside the door at the side.) Here is our master. Let us stay and talk with him. Perhaps Cuchullain will give you a new cap with a feather. He told me that he would give you a new cap with a feather, a feather with an eye that looks at you, a peacock's feather.

BARACH.

No, no. (He begins pulling Fintain towards the door.)

FINTAIN.

If you do not get it now, you may never get it, for the young man may kill him.

BARACH.

No, no, I am hungry. What a head you have, blind man. Who but you would have remembered that the hen-wife slept for a little at noon every day.

FINTAIN.

(Who is being led along very slowly and unwillingly.)

Yes, I have a good head. The fowl should be done just right, but one never knows when a wild dog may come out of the woods.

(They go out through the big door at the back. As they go out Cuchullain & certain young Kings come in at the side door. Cuchullain though still young is a good deal older than the others. They are all very gaily dressed, and have their hair fastened with balls of gold. The young men crowd about Cuchullain with wondering attention.)

FIRST YOUNG KING.

You have hurled that stone beyond our utmost mark

Time after time, but yet you are not weary.

SECOND YOUNG KING.

He has slept on the bare ground of Fuad's Hill

This week past, waiting for the bulls and the deer.

CUCHULLAIN.

Well, why should I be weary?

FIRST YOUNG KING.

It is certain

His father was the god who wheels the sun,

And not king Sualtam.

THIRD YOUNG KING.

(To a young King who is beside him.) He came in the dawn,

And folded Dectara in a sudden fire.

FOURTH YOUNG KING.

And yet the mother's half might well grow weary,

And it new come from labours over sea.

THIRD YOUNG KING.

He has been on islands walled about with silver,

And fought with giants.

(They gather about the ale vat and begin to drink.)

CUCHULLAIN.

Who was it that went out?

THIRD YOUNG KING.

As we came in?

CUCHULLAIN.

Yes.

THIRD YOUNG KING.

Barach and blind Fintain.

CUCHULLAIN.

They always flock together; the blind man

Has need of the fool's eyesight and strong body,

While the poor fool has need of the other's wit,

And night and day is up to his ears in mischief

That the blind man imagines. There's no hen-yard

But clucks and cackles when he passes by

As if he'd been a fox. If I'd that ball

That's in your hair and the big stone again,

I'd keep them tossing, though the one is heavy

And the other light in the hand. A trick I learnt

When I was learning arms in Aoife's country.

FIRST YOUNG KING.

What kind of woman was that Aoife?

CUCHULLAIN.

Comely.

FIRST YOUNG KING.

But I have heard that she was never married,

And yet that's natural, for I have never known

A fighting woman, but made her favours cheap,

Or mocked at love till she grew sandy dry.

CUCHULLAIN.

What manner of woman do you like the best?

A gentle or a fierce.

FIRST YOUNG KING.

A gentle surely.

CUCHULLAIN.

I think that a fierce woman's better, a woman

That breaks away when you have thought her won,

For I'd be fed and hungry at one time.

I think that all deep passion is but a kiss

In the mid battle, and a difficult peace

'Twixt oil and water, candles and dark night,

Hill-side and hollow, the hot-footed sun,

And the cold sliding slippery-footed moon,

A brief forgiveness between opposites

That have been hatreds for three times the age

Of his long ‘stablished ground. Here’s Concobar;

So I’ll be done, but keep beside me still,

For while he talks of hammered bronze and asks

What wood is best for building, we can talk

Of a fierce woman.

(Concobar, a man much older than Cuchullain, has come in through the great door at the back. He has many Kings about him. One of these Kings, Daire, a stout old man, is somewhat drunk.)

CONCOBAR.

(To one of those about him.) Has the ship gone yet? We have need of more bronze workers and that ship I sent to Africa for gold is late.

CUCHULLAIN.

I knew their talk.

CONCOBAR.

(Seeing Cuchullain.) You are before us, King.

CUCHULLAIN.

So much the better, for I welcome you

Into my Muirthemne.

CONCOBAR.

But who are these?

The odour from their garments when they stir

Is like a wind out of an apple garden.

CUCHULLAIN.

My swordsmen and harp players and fine dancers,

My bosom friends.

CONCOBAR.

I should have thought, Cuchullain,

My graver company would better match

Your greatness and your years; but I waste breath

In harping on that tale.

CUCHULLAIN.

You do, great King.

Because their youth is the kind wandering wave

That carries me about the world; and if it sank,

My sword would lose its lightness.

CONCOBAR.

Yet, Cuchullain,

Emain should be the foremost town of the world.

CUCHULLAIN.

It is the foremost town.

CONCOBAR.

No, no, it's not.

Nothing but men can make towns great, and he,

The one over-topping man that's in the world,

Keeps far away.

DAIRE.

He will not hear you, King,

And we old men had best keep company

With one another. I'll fill the horn for you.

CONCOBAR.

I will not drink, old fool. You have drunk a horn

At every door we came to.

DAIRE.

You'd better drink,

For old men light upon their youth again

In the brown ale. When I have drunk enough,

I am like Cuchullain as one pea another,

And live like a bird's flight from tree to tree.

CONCOBAR.

We'll to our chairs for we have much to talk of,

And we have Ullad and Muirthemne, and here

Is Conall Muirthemne in the nick of time.

(He goes to the back of stage to welcome a company of Kings who come in through the great door. The other Kings gradually get into their places. Cuchullain sits in his great chair with certain of the young men standing around him. Others of the young men, however, remain with Daire at the ale vat. Daire holds out the horn of ale to one or two of the older Kings as they pass him going to their places. They pass him by, most of them silently refusing.)

DAIRE.

Will you not drink?

AN OLD KING.

Not till the council's over.

A YOUNG KING.

But I'll drink, Daire.

ANOTHER YOUNG KING.

Fill me a horn too, Daire.

ANOTHER YOUNG KING.

If I'd drunk half that you have drunk to-day,

I'd be upon all fours.

DAIRE.

That would be natural

When Mother Earth had given you this good milk

From her great breasts.

CUCHULLAIN.

(To one of the young Kings beside him)

One is content awhile

With a soft warm woman who folds up our lives

In silky network. Then, one knows not why,

But one’s away after a flinty heart.

THE YOUNG KING.

How long can the net keep us?

CUCHULLAIN.

All our lives

If there are children, and a dozen moons

If there are none, because a growing child

Has so much need of watching it can make

A passion that’s as changeable as the sea

Change till it holds the wide earth to its heart.

At least I have heard a father say it, but I

Being childless do not know it. Come nearer yet;

Though he is ringing that old silver rod

We'll have our own talk out. They cannot hear us.

(Concobar who is now seated in his great chair, opposite Cuchullain, beats upon the pillar of the house that is nearest to him with a rod of silver, till the Kings have become silent. Cuchullain alone continues to talk in a low voice to those about him, but not so loud as to disturb the silence. Concobar rises and speaks standing.)

CONCOBAR.

I have called you hither, Kings of Ullad, and Kings

Of Muirthemne and Connall Muirthemne,

And tributary Kings, for now there is peace —

It's time to build up Emain that was burned

At the outsetting of these wars; for we,

Being the foremost men, should have high chairs

And be much stared at and wondered at, and speak

Out of more laughing overflowing hearts

Than common men. It is the art of kings

To make what's noble nobler in men's eyes

By wide uplifted roofs, where beaten gold,

That’s ruddy with desire, marries pale silver

Among the shadowing beams; and many a time

I would have called you hither to this work,

But always, when I’d all but summoned you,

Some war or some rebellion would break out.

DAIRE.

Where’s Maine Morgor and old Usnach’s children,

And that high-headed even-walking Queen,

And many near as great that got their death

Because you hated peace. I can remember

The people crying out when Deirdre passed

And Maine Morgor had a cold grey eye.

Well, well, I’ll throw this heel-tap on the ground,

For it may be they are thirsty.

A KING.

Be silent, fool.

ANOTHER KING.

Be silent, Daire.

CONCOBAR.

Let him speak his mind.

I have no need to be afraid of ghosts,

For I have made but necessary wars.

I warred to strengthen Emain, or because

When wars are out they marry and beget

And have their generations like mankind

And there’s no help for it; but I’m well content

That they have ended and left the town so great,

That its mere name shall be in times to come

Like a great ale vat where the men of the world

Shall drink no common ale but the hard will,

The unquenchable hope, the friendliness of the sword.

(He takes thin boards on which plans have been carved by those about him.)

Give me the building plans, and have you written

That we — Cuchullain is looking in his shield;

It may be the pale riders of the wind

Throw pictures on it, or that Mananan,

His father's friend and sometime fosterer,

Foreknower of all things, has cast a vision,

Out of the cold dark of the rich sea,

Foretelling Emain's greatness.

CUCHULLAIN.

No, great King,

I looked on this out of mere idleness,

Imagining a woman that I loved.

(The sound of a trumpet without.)

CONCOBAR.

Open the door, for that is a herald's trumpet.

(The great door at the back is flung open; a young man who is fully armed and carries a shield with a woman's head painted on it, stands upon the

threshold. Behind him are trumpeters. He walks into the centre of the hall, the trumpeting ceases.)

What is your message?

YOUNG MAN.

I am of Aoife's army.

FIRST KING.

Queen Aoife and her army have fallen upon us.

SECOND KING.

Out swords! Out swords!

THIRD KING.

They are about the house.

FOURTH KING.

Rush out! Rush out! Before they have fired the thatch.

YOUNG MAN.

Aoife is far away. I am alone.

I have come alone in the midst of you

To weigh this sword against Cuchullain's sword.

(There is a murmur amongst the Kings.)

CONCOBAR.

And are you noble? for if of common seed

You cannot weigh your sword against his sword

But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN.

I am under bonds

To tell my name to no man, but it’s noble.

CONCOBAR.

But I would know your name and not your bonds.

You cannot speak in the Assembly House

If you are not noble.

A KING.

Answer the High King.

YOUNG MAN.

(Drawing his sword.)

I will give no other proof than the hawk gives

That it's no sparrow.

(He is silent a moment then speaks to all.)

Yet look upon me, Kings;

I too am of that ancient seed and carry

The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULLAIN.

To have shown the hawk's grey feather is enough

And you speak highly too.

(Cuchullain comes down from his great chair. He remains standing on the steps of the chair. The young Kings gather about him and begin to arm him.)

Give me that helmet!

I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions.

That coat will do. I'd half forgotten, boy,

How all those great kings came into the mouse-trap

That had been baited with Maeve's pretty daughter.

How Findabair, that blue-eyed Findabair —

But the tale is worthy of a winter's night.

That buckle should be tighter. Give me your shield.

There is good level ground at Baile's Yew-tree

Some dozen yards from here, and it's but truth

That I am sad to-day and this fight welcome.

(He looks hard at the Young Man, and then steps down on to the floor of the Assembly House. He grasps the Young Man by the shoulder.)

Hither into the light.

(Turning to one of the young Kings)

That's the very tint

Of her that I was speaking of but now:

Not a pin's difference.

(To the Young Man)

You are from the North

Where there are many that have that tint of hair

Red brown, the light red brown. Come nearer, boy!

For I would have another look at you.

There’s more likeness, a pale, a stone pale cheek.

What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of death?

YOUNG MAN.

Whether I live or die is in the Gods’ hands.

CUCHULLAIN.

That is all words, all words, a young man’s talk;

I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength,

For he that’s in the sun begot this body

Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell

It seemed as if he had outrun the moon,

That he must always follow through waste heaven,

He loved so happily. He’ll be but slow

To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.

Let’s see that arm; I’ll see it if I like.

That arm had a good father and a good mother

But it is not like this.

YOUNG MAN.

You are mocking me.

You think I am not worthy to be fought,

But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.

CUCHULLAIN.

Put up your sword, I am not mocking you.

I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not

Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye

I cannot tell the reason. You've got her fierceness,

And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.

(To the young Kings)

We'll keep him here in Muirthemne awhile.

A YOUNG KING.

You are the leader of our pack and therefore

May cry what you will.

CUCHULLAIN.

You'll stop with us

And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls

And, when we have grown weary, light our fires

In sandy places where the wool-white foam

Is murmuring and breaking, and it may be

That long-haired women will come out of the dunes

To dance in the yellow fire-light. You hang your head,

Young man, as if it was not a good life;

And yet what's better than to hurl the spear,

And hear the long-remembering harp, and dance;

Friendship grows quicker in the murmuring dark;

But I can see there's no more need for words

And that you'll be my friend now.

FIRST OLD KING.

Concobar,

Forbid their friendship, for it will get twisted

To a reproach against us.

CONCOBAR.

Until now

I'd never need to cry Cuchullain on

And would not now.

FIRST OLD KING.

They'll say his manhood's quenched.

CUCHULLAIN.

I'll give you gifts, but I'll have something too,

An arm-ring or the like, and if you will

We'll fight it out when you are older, boy.

AN OLD KING.

Aoife will make some story out of this.

CUCHULLAIN.

Well, well, what matter, I'll have that arm-ring, boy.

YOUNG MAN.

There is no man I'd sooner have my friend

Than you whose name has gone about the world

As if it had been the wind, but Aoife'd say

I had turned coward.

CUCHULLAIN.

I'll give you gifts

That Aoife'll know and all her people know

To have been my gifts. Mananan son of the sea

Gave me this heavy purple cloak. Nine Queens

Of the Land-under-Wave had woven it

Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her

I was afraid, or tell her what you will.

No! tell her that I heard a raven croak

On the north side of the house and was afraid.

AN OLD KING.

Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchullain's mind.

CUCHULLAIN.

No witchcraft, his head is like a woman's head

I had a fancy for.

SECOND OLD KING.

A witch of the air

Can make a leaf confound us with memories.

They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.

CUCHULLAIN.

But there's no trick in this. That arm-ring, boy.

THIRD OLD KING.

He shall not go unfought, I'll fight with him.

FOURTH OLD KING.

No! I will fight with him.

FIRST OLD KING.

I claim the fight,

For when we sent an army to her land —

SECOND OLD KING.

I claim the fight, for one of Aoife's galleys

Stole my great cauldron and a herd of pigs.

THIRD OLD KING.

No, no, I claim it, for at Lammas' time —

CUCHULLAIN.

Back! Back! Put up your swords! Put up your swords!

There's none alive that shall accept a challenge

I have refused. Laegaire, put up your sword.

YOUNG MAN.

No, let them come, let any three together.

If they've a mind to, I'll try it out with four.

CUCHULLAIN.

That's spoken as I'd spoken it at your age,

But you are in my house. Whatever man

Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.

They’re dumb. They’re dumb. How many of you would meet (drawing his sword)

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,

This edge that’s greyer than the tide, this mouse

That’s gnawing at the timbers of the world,

This, this — Boy, I would meet them all in arms

If I’d a son like you. He would avenge me

When I have withstood for the last time the men

Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed

Upholding Ullad; when the four provinces

Have gathered with the ravens over them.

But I’d need no avenger. You and I

Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN.

We’ll stand by one another from this out.

Here is the ring.

CUCHULLAIN.

No, turn and turn about

But my turn is first, because I am the older.

Cliodna embroidered these bird wings, but Fand

Made all these little golden eyes with the hairs

That she had stolen out of Aengus' beard,

And therefore none that has this cloak about him

Is crossed in love. The heavy inlaid brooch

That Buan hammered has a merit too.

(He begins spreading the cloak out on a bench, showing it to the Young Man. Suddenly Concobar beats with his silver rod on a pillar beside his chair. All turn towards him.)

CONCOBAR.

(In a loud voice.) No more of that, I will not have this friendship.

Cuchullain is my man and I forbid it;

He shall not go unfought for I myself —

CUCHULLAIN.

(Seizing Concobar.) You shall not stir, High King, I'll hold you there.

CONCOBAR.

Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS.

(Shouting.) Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft.

A KING.

You saw another's head upon his shoulders

All of a sudden, a woman's head, Cuchullain,

Then raised your hand against the King of Ullad.

CUCHULLAIN.

(Letting Concobar go, and looking wildly about him.)

Yes, yes, all of a sudden, all of a sudden.

DAIRE.

Why, there's no witchcraft in it, I myself

Have made a hundred of these sudden friendships

And fought it out next day. But that was folly,

For now that I am old I know it is best

To live in comfort.

A KING.

Pull the fool away.

DAIRE.

I'll throw a heel-tap to the one that dies.

CONCOBAR.

Some witch is floating in the air above us.

CUCHULLAIN.

Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft and the power of witchcraft.

(To the Young Man)

Why did you do it? was it Calatin's daughters?

Out, out, I say, for now it's sword on sword.

YOUNG MAN.

But, but, I did not.

CUCHULLAIN.

Out, I say, out, out!

Sword upon sword.

(He goes towards the door at back, followed by Young Man. He turns on the threshold and cries out, looking at the Young Man.)

That hair my hands were drowned in!

(He goes out, followed by Young Man. The other Kings begin to follow them out.)

A KING.

I saw him fight with Ferdiad.

SECOND KING.

We'll be too late

They're such a long time getting through the door.

THIRD KING.

Run quicker, quicker.

DAIRE.

I was at the Smith's

When he that was the boy Setanta then —

(Sound of fighting outside.)

THIRD KING.

He will have killed him. They have begun the fight!

(They all go out, leaving the house silent and empty. There is a pause during which one hears the clashing of the swords. Barach and Fintain come in from side door. Barach is dragging Fintain.)

BARACH.

You have eaten it, you have eaten it, you have left me nothing but the bones.

FINTAIN.

O, that I should have to endure such a plague.

O, I ache all over. O, I am pulled in pieces.

This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you!

BARACH.

You have eaten it, you have told me lies about a wild dog. Nobody has seen a wild dog about the place this twelve month. Lie there till the Kings come. O, I will tell Concobar and Cuchullain and all the Kings about you!

FINTAIN.

What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits. If I did not take care of you what would you do for food and warmth!

BARACH.

You take care of me? You stay safe and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gull's eggs while you warmed your blind

eyes in the sun. And then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. (The blind man tries to rise. Barach makes him lie down again.)

Keep quiet now till I shut the door. There is some noise outside. There are swords crossing; a high vexing noise so that I can't be listening to myself. (He goes to the big door at the back and shuts it.) Why can't they be quiet, why can't they be quiet. Ah, you would get away, would you? (He follows the blind man who has been crawling along the wall and makes him lie down close to the King's chair.) Lie there, lie there. No, you won't get away. Lie there till the Kings come, I'll tell them all about you. I shall tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows and the rainy side when it rains?

FINTAIN.

O good fool, listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there, you were always wandering about.

BARACH.

The last time you brought me in, it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot, when you thought nobody was looking. Keep quiet now, keep quiet till I shut the door. Here is Cuchullain, now you will be beaten. I am going to tell him everything.

CUCHULLAIN.

(Comes in and says to the fool) Give me that horn.

(The fool gives him a horn which Cuchullain fills with ale and drinks.)

FINTAIN.

Do not listen to him, listen to me.

CUCHULLAIN.

What are you wrangling over?

BARACH.

He is fat and good for nothing. He has left me the bones and the feathers.

CUCHULLAIN.

What feathers?

BARACH.

I left him turning a fowl at the fire. He ate it all. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers.

FINTAIN.

Do not believe him. You do not know how vain this fool is. I gave him the feathers, because I thought he would like nothing so well.

(Barach is sitting on a bench playing with a heap of feathers which he has taken out of the breast of his coat.)

BARACH.

(Singing) When you were an acorn on the tree top —

FINTAIN.

Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking, thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon's at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in its snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip through his hands back into the water.

BARACH.

(Singing) When you were an acorn on the tree top,

Then was I an eagle cock;

Now that you are a withered old block,

Still am I an eagle cock!

FINTAIN.

Listen to him now! That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out day in. (The fool is putting the feathers into his hair. Cuchullain takes a handful of feathers out of the heap and out of the fool's hair and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.)

BARACH.

He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword!

FINTAIN.

Whose blood? Whose blood?

CUCHULLAIN.

That young champion's.

FINTAIN.

He that came out of Aoife's country?

CUCHULLAIN.

The Kings are standing round his body.

FINTAIN.

Did he fight long?

CUCHULLAIN.

He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

BARACH.

That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULLAIN.

(To the blind man.) You knew him, then?

FINTAIN.

I saw him when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

CUCHULLAIN.

You were in Aoife's country?

FINTAIN.

I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULLAIN.

He was about to speak of her when he died.

FINTAIN.

He was a Queen's son.

CUCHULLAIN.

What Queen, what Queen? (He seizes the blind man.)

Was it Scathach? There were many Queens.

All the rulers there were Queens.

FINTAIN.

No, not Scathach.

CUCHULLAIN.

It was Uathach then. Speak, speak!

FINTAIN.

I cannot speak, you are clutching me too tightly. (Cuchullain lets him go.) I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some Queen.

BARACH.

He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULLAIN.

She? No, no, she had no son when I was there.

BARACH.

That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULLAIN.

I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman, a proud pale amorous woman.

FINTAIN.

None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULLAIN.

None knew? Did you know, old listener at doors?

FINTAIN.

No, no, I knew nothing.

BARACH.

He said a while ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. (A pause.)

FINTAIN.

Somebody is trembling. Why are you trembling, fool? the bench is shaking, why are you trembling? Is Cuchullain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchullain.

BARACH.

It is Cuchullain who is trembling. He is shaking the bench with his knees.

CUCHULLAIN.

He was my son, and I have killed my son.

(A pause.)

‘Twas they that did it, the pale windy people,

Where, where, where? My sword against the thunder.

But no, for they have always been my friends;

And though they love to blow a smoking coal

Till it’s all flame, the wars they blow aflame

Are full of glory, and heart uplifting pride,

And not like this; the wars they love awaken

Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.

Who did it then? Are you afraid; speak out,

For I have put you under my protection

And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer.

He had an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.

Laegaire did it. Why do you not speak?

What is this house?

(A pause.)

Now I remember all.

FINTAIN.

He will kill us. O, I am afraid!

CUCHULLAIN.

(Who is before Concobar's chair.)

'Twas you who did it, you who sat up there

With that old branch of silver, like a magpie

Nursing a stolen spoon. Magpie, Magpie,

A maggot that is eating up the earth!

(Begins hacking at the chair with his sword.)

No, but a magpie for he's flown away.

Where did he fly to?

FINTAIN.

He is outside the door.

CUCHULLAIN.

Outside the door?

FINTAIN.

He is under Baile's yew-tree.

CUCHULLAIN.

Concobar, Concobar, the sword into your heart.

(He goes out. A pause. The fool goes to the great door at back and looks out after him.)

BARACH.

He is going up to King Concobar; they are all under the tree. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. (A pause.) Well struck, well struck!

FINTAIN.

What is he doing now?

BARACH.

O! he is fighting the waves.

FINTAIN.

He sees King Concobar's crown on every one of them.

BARACH.

There, he has struck at a big one. He has struck the crown off it, he has made the foam fly. There again another big one. (Shouting without.)

FINTAIN.

Where are the Kings? What are the Kings doing?

BARACH.

They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses, they are all running.

FINTAIN.

You say they are running out of the houses, there will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, fool.

BARACH.

There, he is down! He is up again! He is going out into the deep water.

FINTAIN.

Come here, fool; come here, I say.

BARACH.

(Coming towards him but looking backward towards the door.) What is it?

FINTAIN.

There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way, come quickly; the ovens will be full; we will put our hands into the ovens. (They go out.)

Deirdre

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MUSICIANS.
FERGUS, *an old man*.
NAISI, *a young king*.
DEIRDRE, *his queen*.
A DARK-FACED MESSENGER.
CONCHUBAR (*pronounced* conochar), *the old King of*
ULADH, *who is still strong and vigorous*.
DARK-FACED EXECUTIONER.

DEIRDRE

Scene: *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier: they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.*

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have a story right, my wanderers,
That has so mixed with fable in our songs,
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and this house
Is an old guest-house built for travellers
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal house,
And there are certain hills among these woods
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

SECOND MUSICIAN. That famous queen
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?

FIRST MUS. [*going nearer to the brazier].*
Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found
A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there's nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage day,
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,

NAISI, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
Carried her off.

SECOND MUS. The tale were well enough
Had it a finish.

FIRST MUS. Hush! I have more to tell;
But gather close that I may whisper it:
I speak of terrible, mysterious ends —
The secrets of a king.

SECOND MUS. — There's none to hear!

FIRST MUS. I have been to Conchubar's house and followed up
A crowd of servants going out and in
With loads upon their heads: embroideries
To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes
To strew upon the floors, and came at length
To a great room.

SECOND MUS. Be silent; there are steps!
[Enter FERGUS, *an old man, who moves about from door to window excitedly through what follows.*

FERGUS. I thought to find a message from the king.
You are musicians by these instruments,
And if as seems — for you are comely women —
You can praise love, you'll have the best of luck,
For there'll be two, before the night is in,
That bargained for their love, and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time
To weigh a happy music with a sad;
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the son of Usna and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

FIRST MUS. — Deirdre and her man!

FERGUS. I was to have found a message in this house,
And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Rogh?

FIRST MUS. Are Deirdre and her lover tired of life?

FERGUS. You are not of this country, or you'd know
That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

FIRST MUS. We have no country but the roads of the world.

FERGUS. Then you should know that all things change in the world,
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

FIRST MUS. — An old man's love
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure;
His jealousy is like his love.

FERGUS. — And that's but true.
You have learned something in your wanderings.
He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,
But I alone, thought it impossible;
Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,
I had my way, and all's forgiven now;
And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
That I lack tongue for.

FIRST MUS. — Yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS. *[going to door],* I am Conchubar's near friend, and that weighed somewhat,
And it was policy to pardon them.
The need of some young, famous, popular man
To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,

And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.
They have been wandering half-a-dozen years.

FIRST MUS. And yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS. *[coming from door* Sing the more sweetly
Because, though age is arid as a bone,
This man has flowered. I've need of music, too;
If this grey head would suffer no reproach,
I'd dance and sing —
[Dark-faced men *with strange, barbaric dress and arms begin to pass by the doors and windows. They pass one by one and in silence.]*
and dance till the hour ran out,
Because I have accomplished this good deed.

FIRST MUS. Look there — there at the window, those dark men,
With murderous and outlandish-looking arms —
They've been about the house all day.

FERGUS. [*looking after them*]. What are you?
Where do you come from, who is it sent you here?

FIRST MUS. They will not answer you.

FERGUS. — They do not hear.

FIRST MUS. Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes
That have seen many lands, they are such men
As kings will gather for a murderous task,
That neither bribes, commands, nor promises
Can bring their people to.

FERGUS. — And that is why
You harped upon an old man's jealousy.
A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's fame
Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.
They may have brought him Libyan dragonskin,
Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

FIRST MUS. If these be merchants, I have seen the goods
They have brought to Conchubar, and understood
His murderous purpose.

FERGUS. — Murderous, you say?
Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?
But I'll not hear.

FIRST MUS. It may be life or death.
There is a room in Conchubar's house, and there —

FERGUS. Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.
There's many a one that would do more than that,
And make it prison, or death, or banishment
To slander the high King.
[Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.
He is my friend;
I have his oath, and I am well content.
I have known his mind as if it were my own
These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought
Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit

By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
That common things are lost, and all that's strange
Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.
[Going to the door again.
Quick! quick! your instruments! they are coming now.
I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song;
But what is it to be? I'd have them hear
A music foaming up out of the house
Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse
Of some old time not worth remembering,
And all the lovelier because a bubble.
Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,
Of Luhgaidh Redstripe or another; no, not him,
He and his lady perished wretchedly.
first musician [singing]
'Why is it,' Queen Edain said,
'If I do but climb the stair....

FERGUS. Ah! that is better.... They are alighted now.
Shake all your cockscombs, children; these are lovers. — [FERGUS *goes out.*

FIRST MUSICIAN
'Why is it,' Queen Edain said,
'If I do but climb the stair
To the tower overhead,
When the winds are calling there,
Or the gannets calling out,
In waste places of the sky,

There's so much to think about,
That I cry, that I cry?'

SECOND MUSICIAN
But her goodman answered her:
'Love would be a thing of nought
Had not all his limbs a stir
Born out of immoderate thought;
Were he anything by half,
Were his measure running dry.
Lovers, if they may not laugh,
Have to cry, have to cry.'
[DEIRDRE, NAISI, *and* FERGUS *have been seen for a moment through the windows, but now they have entered.*

THE THREE MUSICIANS [*together]*
But is Edain worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew?
Praise the beautiful and strong;
Praise the redness of the yew;
Praise the blossoming apple-stem.
But our silence had been wise.
What is all our praise to them,
That have one another's eyes?

DEIRDRE. Silence your music, though I thank you for it;
But the wind's blown upon my hair,- and I
Must set the jewels on my neck and head
For one that's coming.

NAISI. — Your colour has all gone
As ‘twere with fear, and there’s no cause for that.

DEIRDRE. These women have the raddle that they use
To make them brave and confident, although
Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o’ their cheeks.
You’ll help me, women. It is my husband’s will
I show my trust in one, that may be here
Before the mind can call the colour up.
My husband took these rubies from a king
Of Surracha that was so murderous
He seemed all glittering dragon. Now wearing them
Myself wars on myself, for I myself —
That do my husband’s will, yet fear to do it —
Grow dragonish to myself.
[The women *have gathered about her.*

NAISI *has stood looking at her, but*

FERGUS. *brings him to the chess table.*

NAISI. — No messenger!
It’s strange that there is none to welcome us.

FERGUS. King Conchubar has sent no messenger
That he may come himself.

NAISI. — And being himself,
Being High King, he cannot break his faith.
I have his word and I must take that word,

Or prove myself unworthy of my nurture
Under a great man's roof.

FERGUS. — We'll play at chess
Till the king comes. It is but natural
That she should doubt him, for her house has been
The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

NAISI. If I were childish and had faith in omens,
I'd rather not have lit on that old chessboard
At my home-coming.

FERGUS. — There's a tale about it —
It has been lying there these many years —
Some wild old sorrowful tale.

NAISI. — It is the board
Where Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
Who had a seamew's body half the year,
Played at the chess upon the night they died.

FERGUS. I can remember now, a tale of treachery,
A broken promise and a journey's end —
But it were best forgot.

[DEIRDRE *has been standing with the* women *about her. They have been helping her to put on her jewels and to put the pigment on her cheeks and arrange her hair. She has gradually grown attentive to what* Fergus *is saying.*

NAISI. — If the tale's true,
When it was plain that they had been betrayed,
They moved the men and waited for the end
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds
They hardly winked their eyes when the sword flashed.

FERGUS. She never could have played so, being a woman,
If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.

DEIRDRE. I have heard the Ever-living warn mankind
By changing clouds, and casual accidents
Or what seem so.

NAISI. — It would but ill become us,
Now that King Conchubar has pledged his word,
Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.

DEIRDRE. There's none to welcome us.

NAISI. — Being his guest,
Words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves.

DEIRDRE. An empty house upon the journey's end!
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest?

FERGUS. — He is but making ready
A welcome in his house, arranging where
The moorhen and the mallard go, and where
The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.

DEIRDRE. Had he no messenger?

NAISI. — Such words and fears
Wrong this old man who's pledged his word to us.
We must not speak or think as women do,
That when the house is all a-bed sit up
Marking among the ashes with a stick
Till they are terrified. — Being what we are
You should have too calm thought to start at shadows.
[To Fergus.] Come, let us look if there's a messenger
From Conchubar. We cannot see from this
Because we are blinded by the leaves and twigs,
But it may be the wood will thin again.
It is but kind that when the lips we love
Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears
Our ears be deaf.

FERGUS. — But now I had to threaten
These wanderers because they would have weighed
Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.
If I had thought so little of mankind
I never could have moved him to this pardon.
I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

[NAISI *and* Fergus *go out. The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards* CONCHUBAR's *house.*

FIRST MUS. If anything lies heavy on your heart,
Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

DEIRDRE. You've been in love?

FIRST MUS. If you would speak of love,
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the kisses
That were upon our lips, and when we are old
Their memory will be all the life we have.

DEIRDRE. There was a man that loved me.
He was old;
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.
He has made promises, and brought me home;
But though I turn it over in my thoughts,
I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook.

FIRST MUS. I have heard he loved you,
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.

DEIRDRE. You mean that when a man who has loved like that
Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,
And that love drowned and floating is but hate;
And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,
Till he has killed; and that, though the day laughs,
We shall be dead at cock-crow.

FIRST MUS. You have not my thought.
When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied, till my passion had run out,
That could I carry him away with me,
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

DEIRDRE. Ah! now I catch your meaning, that this king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

FIRST MUS. 'Tis you that put that meaning
upon words
Spoken at random.

DEIRDRE. — Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,
Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random; if they hint at it at all
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.

FIRST MUS. We have little that is certain.

DEIRDRE. — Certain or not.
Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it;
I never have met any of your kind,
But that I gave them money, food, and fire.

FIRST MUS. There are strange, miracleworking, wicked stones,
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons.

DEIRDRE. — The hot Istain stone,
And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.

FIRST MUS. They have so great an influence, if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.

DEIRDRE. O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory,
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe!

FIRST MUS. I have seen a bridal bed, so curtained in,
So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
And learned that a bride's coming.

DEIRDRE. — And I the bride?
Here is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,
For she but died and mixed into the dust
Of her dear comrade, but I am to live
And lie in the one bed with him I hate.

Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this
When Conchubar first chose me for his wife;
I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,
But now there is worse need.

NAISI [*entering with* Fergus]. Why have you called?
I was but standing there, without the door.

DEIRDRE. I have heard terrible mysterious things,
Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

FERGUS. Why, that's no wonder. You have been listening
To singers of the roads that gather up
The stories of the world.

DEIRDRE. — But I have one
To make the stories of the world but nothing.

NAISI. Be silent if it is against the king
Whose guest you are.

FERGUS. — No, let her speak it out,
I know the High King's heart as it were my own,
And can refute a slander, but already
I have warned these women that it may be death.

NAISI. I will not weigh the gossip of the roads
With the king's word. I ask your pardon for her:
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.

DEIRDRE. Am I to see the fowler and the cage
And speak no word at all?

NAISI. — You would have known,
Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.

DEIRDRE. Though death may come of it?

NAISI. — Though death may come.

DEIRDRE. When first we came into this empty house
You had foreknowledge of our death, and even
When speaking of the paleness of my cheek
Your own cheek blanched.

NAISI. — Listen to this old man.
He can remember all the promises
We trusted to.

DEIRDRE. You speak from the lips out
And I am pleading for your life and mine.

NAISI. Listen to this old man, for many think
He has a golden tongue.

DEIRDRE. — Then I will say
What it were best to carry to the grave.
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.

It was for him, to stir him to desire,
I put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar.

NAISI. What frenzy put these words into your mouth?

DEIRDRE. No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy
To change what shifts with every change of the wind,
Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings?
Was I not born a woman?

NAISI. — You're mocking me.

DEIRDRE. And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

NAISI. What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight?

DEIRDRE. — Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men's hearts
And lack it in themselves? And yet I think
That being half good I might change round again
Were we aboard our ship and on the sea.

NAISI. We'll to the horses and take ship again

FERGUS. Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy
With crafty words.

DEIRDRE. Were we not born to wander?
These jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword
Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me;
But who can tell what change can come to love
Among the valleys? I speak no falsehood now.
Away to windy summits, and there mock
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird!

FERGUS. Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel up
That has brought death to many. I have made peace;
Poured water on the fire, but if you fly
King Conchubar may think that he is mocked
And the house blaze again; and in what quarter,
If Conchubar were the treacherous man you think,
Would you find safety now that you have come
Into the very middle of his power,
Under his very eyes.

DEIRDRE. — Under his eyes
And in the very middle of his power.
Then there is but one way to make all safe,
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery
And houseless wandering on the man I loved.
These wanderers will show me how to do it;
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars.
Oh, that the creatures of the woods had torn
My body with their claws!

FERGUS. — What, wilder yet!

DEIRDRE. *[to* NAISI]. Whatever were to happen to my face
I'd be myself, and there's not any way
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

NAISI. Leave the gods' handiwork unblotched, and wait
For their decession, our decession is past.

[A dark-faced messenger *comes to the threshold.*

FERGUS. Peace, peace; the messenger is at the door;
He stands upon the threshold; he stands there;
He stands, King Conchubar's purpose on his lips.

MESSENGER.Supper is on the table, Conchubar
Is waiting for his guests.

FERGUS. — All's well again!
All's well! all's well! You cried your doubts so loud
That I had almost doubted.

NAISI. — We doubted him,
And he the while but busy in his house
For the more welcome.

DEIRDRE. The message is not finished.

FERGUS. Come quickly. Conchubar will laugh, that I —
Although I held out boldly in my speech —
That I, even I —

DEIRDRE. Wait, wait! He is not done.

MESSENGER.Deirdre and Fergus, son of
Roigh, are summoned;
But not the traitor that bore off the queen.
It is enough that the king pardon her,
And call her to his table and his bed.

NAISI. So then, it's treachery.

FERGUS. — I'll not believe it.

NAISI. Lead on and I will follow at your heels
That I may challenge him before his court
To match me there, or match me in some place
Where none can come between us but our swords,
For I have found no truth on any tongue
That's not of iron.

MESSENGER.I am Conchubar's man,
I am content to serve an iron tongue:
That Tongue commands that Fergus, son of Roigh
And Deirdre come this night into his house
And none but they.
[He goes followed by NAISI.

FERGUS. Some rogue, some enemy,
Has bribed him to embroil us with the king;
I know that he has lied because I know
King Conchubar's mind as if it were my own,

But I'll find out the truth.
[He is about to follow NAISI, *but* DEIRDRE *stops him.*

DEIRDRE. — No, no, old man,
You thought the best, and the worst came of it;
We listened to the counsel of the wise,
And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.
Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me;
It may be that his passion is asleep,
And that we may escape.

FERGUS. — But I'll go first,
And follow up that Libyan heel, and send
Such words to Conchubar, that he may know
At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

NAISI *enters.*

NAISI. The Libyan, knowing that a servant's life
Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and mocked.

FERGUS. I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-hooks,
And carry you in safety to the ships.
My name has still some power. I will protect,
Or, if that is impossible, revenge.
[Goes out by other door.

NAISI *[who is calm, like a man who has passed beyond life"].* The crib has fallen and the birds are in it;

There is not one of the great oaks about us
But shades a hundred men.

DEIRDRE. — Let's out and die,
Or break away, if the chance favour us.

NAISI. They would but drag you from me, stained with blood.
Their barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,
And I would have you die as a queen should —
In a death chamber. You are in my charge.
We will wait here, and when they come upon us,
I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's over,
Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.

DEIRDRE. I will stay here; but you go out and fight.
Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them leaving it,
We shall be ever friendless.

NAISI. — What do they say?
That Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of his
Sat at this chessboard, waiting for their end.
They knew that there was nothing that could save them,
And so played chess as they had any night
For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.
I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is there

For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.
[To musicians.] Had you been here when that man and his queen
Played at so high a game, could you have found
An ancient poem for the praise of it?
It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew
Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,
As though she'd say: 'There's nothing happening
But that a king and queen are playing chess.'

DEIRDRE. He's in the right, though I have not been born
Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot,
And though I have loved better than that queen,
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.
Oh, singing women, set it down in a book,
That love is all we need, even though it is
But the last drops we gather up like this;
And though the drops are all we have known of life,
For we have been most friendless — praise us for it
And praise the double sunset, for naught's lacking,
But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

NAISI. Light torches there and drive the shadows out.
For day's grey end comes up.

[A musician *lights a torch in the fire and then crosses before the chess-players, and slowly lights the torches in the sconces. The light is almost gone from the wood, but there is a clear evening light in the sky, increasing the sense of solitude and loneliness.*

DEIRDRE. — Make no sad music.
What is it but a king and queen at chess?
They need a music that can mix itself
Into imagination, but not break
The steady thinking that the hard game needs.
["During the chess, the musicians *sing this song.]*
Love is an immoderate thing
And can never be content,
Till it dip an ageing wing,
Where some laughing element
Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.
What's the merit in love-play,
In the tumult of the limbs
That dies out before 'tis day,
Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
All that mingling of our breath,
When love longing is but drouth
For the things come after death?
[During the last verses DEIRDRE *rises from the board and kneels at* NAISI's *feet.*

DEIRDRE. I cannot go on playing like that woman
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.

NAISI. It is your move. Take up your man again.

DEIRDRE. Do you remember that first night in the woods
We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,
When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,
Saw leaves above us? You thought that I still slept,
And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,
Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that's over, we'll be different;
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.
And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.
[CONCHUBAR *comes to the door.*

MUS. Children, beware!

NAISI *[laughing].* He has taken up my challenge;
Whether I am a ghost or living man
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.
[Turns to fetch spear and shield, and then sees that CONCHUBAR *has gone.*

FIRST MUS. He came to spy upon you, not to fight.

NAISI. A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.
He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting, but has come too near,
And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.

Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it's topsy-turvy. I upon you.
[He rushes out after CONCHUBAR.

DEIRDRE. You have a knife there, thrust into your girdle.
I'd have you give it me.

MUS. — No, but I dare not.

DEIRDRE. No, but you must.
m us. — If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.

DEIRDRE. [*snatching knife].* There is no mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge.
[Goes to the door and looks out.

MUS. — You have taken it,
I did not give it you; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

DEIRDRE. The leaves hide all, and there's no way to find
What path to follow. Why is there no sound?
[She goes from door to window.

MUS. Where would you go?

DEIRDRE. To strike a blow for Naisi,
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash? They have met by this!

MUS. Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much,
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred?

DEIRDRE. *[going towards them*]. Women, if I die,
If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?
What words seek out? for that will stand to you;
For being but dead we shall have many friends.
All through your wanderings, the doors of kings
Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth
Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this
[Gives musician *a bracelet.*
To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

MUS. Have you not been paid servants in love's house
To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors?
And though you have suffered all for mere love's sake
You'd live your lives again.

DEIRDRE. — Even this last hour.
CONCHUBAR *enters with dark-faced* men.

CONCHUBAR One woman and two men; that is the quarrel
That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose
Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.
[The dark-faced men *drag in* NAISI *entangled in a net.*

NAISI. I have been taken like a bird or a fish.

CONCHUBAR He cried ‘Beast, beast!’ and in a blind-beast rage
He ran at me and fell into the nets,
But we were careful for your sake, and took him
With all the comeliness that woke desire
Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient
I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

DEIRDRE. What do you say? Have you forgiven him?

NAISI. He is but mocking us. What’s left to say
Now that the seven years’ hunt is at an end?

DEIRDRE. He never doubted you until I made him,
And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

CONCHUBAR But his young blood is hot,
And if we’re of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly wronged,
Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.
Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I’ll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of youth
You carried her away; but I’ve had time
To think it out through all these seven years.
I will show mercy.

NAISI. — You have many words.

CONCHUBAR I will not make a bargain; I but ask
What is already mine.
[DEIRDRE *moves slowly towards* CONCHUBAR *while he is speakings her eyes fixed upon him.*
You may go free
If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.
The doors are open, and the floors are strewed
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness,
By races that are germane to the sun,
And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins —
For when they're wounded the wound drips with wine —
Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands
The crown and robe.

DEIRDRE. Oh, no! Not that, not that.
Ask any other thing but that one thing.
Leave me with Naisi. We will go away.
Into some country at the ends of the earth.
We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one
That will not praise you if you pardon us.
'He is good, he is good,' they'll say to one another;
'There's nobody like him, for he forgave
Deirdre and Naisi.'

CONCHUBAR — Do you think that I
Shall let you go again, after seven years
Of longing and of planning here and there,
And trafficking with merchants for the stones
That make all sure, and watching my own face
That none might read it?

DEIRDRE. *to* NAISI. It's better to go with him.
Why should you die when one can bear it all?
My life is over; it's better to obey.
Why should you die? I will not live long,

NAISI.
I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living;
Oh no, no, no! You will go far away.
You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi, speak,
And say that it is better that I go.
I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,
For I will take it all upon myself.
Conchubar, I will go.

NAISI. — And do you think
That, were I given life at such a price,
I would not cast it from me? O my eagle!
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night's above?

DEIRDRE. — It's better, Naisi.
It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.
For what am I, to be remembered always?

And there are other women. There was one,
The daughter of the King of Leodas;
I could not sleep because of her. Speak to him;
Tell it out plain, and make him understand.
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,
Say that I will not.

NAISI. — Would I had lost life
Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,
Because you were my wife, or that the worst
Had taken you before this bargaining!
O — O eagle! If you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits, and call out,
And you could never come there, being banished.

DEIRDRE. *[kneeling to* CONCHUBAR]. I would obey, but cannot. Pardon us.
1 — I know that you are good. I have heard you praised
For giving gifts; and you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.
[Unseen by DEIRDRE, NAISI *is gagged.*
The very moment these eyes fell on him,
I told him; I held out my hands to him;
How could he refuse? At first he would not —
I am not lying — he remembered you.
What do I say? My hands? — No, no, my lips —

For I had pressed my lips upon his lips —
I swear it is not false — my breast to his;
[CONCHUBAR *motions*; NAISI, *unseen by* DEIRDRE, *is taken behind the curtain.*
Until I woke the passion that's in all,
And how could he resist? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong man,
Who is not foolish at the council-board,
Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light
And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
Moves him to mirth, not madness.
[She stands up.
What am I saying?
You may have need of him, for you have none
Who is so good a sword, or so well loved
Among the common people. You may need him,
And what king knows when the hour of need may come?
You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.
Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
'I am Conchubar — I have no need of him.'
You will cry out for him some day and say,
'If Naisi were but living ' — *[she misses* NAISI]. Where is he?
Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?
Where is he, O, where is he?
[She staggers over to the musicians.
The executioner *has come out with sword on which there is blood*;
CONCHUBAR *points to it. The* musicians *give a wail.*

CONCHUBAR The traitor who has carried off my wife
No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre,
For he that called himself your husband's dead.

DEIRDRE., O, do not touch me. Let me go to him. — *[Pause.*
King Conchubar is right. My husband's dead.
A single woman is of no account,
Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,
The bacon hanging — and King Conchubar's house
All ready, too — I'll to King Conchubar's house.
It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

CONCHUBAR But why are you so calm?
I thought that you would curse me and cry out,
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.

DEIRDRE *[laughing].* You know too much of women to think so;
Though, if I were less worthy of desire,
I would pretend as much; but, being myself,
It is enough that you were master here.
Although we are so delicately made,
There's something brutal in us, and we are won
By those who can shed blood. It was some woman
That taught you how to woo: but do not touch me:
I shall do all you bid me, but not yet
Because I have to do what's customary.
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,

And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all's in order; and all this I'll do
For Naisi, son of Usna.

CONCHUBAR — It is not fitting.
You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,
And there are plenty that can do these things.

DEIRDRE. *[motioning* CONCHUBAR *away].*
No, no. Not yet. I cannot be your queen,
Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.
When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,
He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
'There's so much owing.'

CONCHUBAR — You are deceiving me.
You long to look upon his face again.
Why should I give you now to a dead man
That took you from a living?
[He makes a step towards her.

DEIRDRE. — In good time.
You'll stir me to more passion than he could,
And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this:
That I go look upon him that was once
So strong and comely and held his head so high
That women envied me. For I will see him
All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
It's better, when you're beside me in your strength,
That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,

And not the shape I loved. Look at him, women.
He heard me pleading to be given up,
Although my lover was still living, and yet
He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell him
How changeable all women are; how soon
Even the best of lovers is forgot,
When his day's finished.

CONCHUBAR — No; but I will trust
The strength that you have praised, and not your purpose.

DEIRDRE. *[almost with a caress*]. It is so small a gift and you will grant it
Because it is the first that I have asked.
He has refused. There is no sap in him;
Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.
He has refused me the first thing I have asked —
Me, me, his wife. I understand him now;
I know the sort of life I'll have with him;
But he must drag me to his house by force.
If he refuses [*she laughs]* he shall be mocked of all.
They'll say to one another, 'Look at him
That is so jealous that he lured a man
From over sea, and murdered him, and yet
He trembled at the thought of a dead face!'
[She has her hand upon curtain.

CONCHUBAR How do I know that you have not some knife,
And go to die upon his body?

DEIRDRE. — Have me searched,
If you would make so little of your queen.
It may be that I have a knife hid here
Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slaves
To search me for it. — *[Pause.*

CONCHUBAR Go to your farewells, queen.

DEIRDRE. Now strike the wire, and sing to it a while,
Knowing that all is happy, and that you know
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,
And by what man, and lie close up to him
For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-crow. *[She goes behind the curtain.*

FIRST MUS. They are gone, they are gone.
The proud may lie by the proud.

SECOND MUS. Though we were bidden to sing, cry nothing loud.

FIRST MUS. They are gone, they are gone.

SECOND MUS. — Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUS. Into the secret wilderness of their love.

SECOND MUS. A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said?

FIRST MUS. Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.
[Shouting outside. Fergus *enters.*

Many men with scythes and sickles and torches gather about the doors. The house is lit with the glare of their torches.

FERGUS. Where's Naisi, son of Usna, and his queen?
I and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.

CONCHUBAR You have come too late.
I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine;
She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.
I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull
This apple among the winds. Open the curtain,
That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.
[The curtain is drawn back. The musicians *begin to keen with low voices.*
No, no; I'll not believe it. She is not dead —
She cannot have escaped a second time!

FERGUS. King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon her.
What's this but empty cage and tangled wire,
Now the bird's gone? But I'll not have you touch it.

CONCHUBAR You are all traitors, all against me — all.
And she has deceived me for a second time;
And every common man can keep his wife,
But not the King.
[Loud shouting outside: 'Death to Conchubar!' 'Where is Naisi?'
etc. *The dark-skinned* men *gather round* CONCHUBAR *and draw their swords; but he motions them away.*
I have no need of weapons,
There's not a traitor that dare stop my way.

Howl, if you will; but, I being king, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.

The Unicorn from the Stars

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

FATHER JOHN

THOMAS HEARNE a coach builder.

ANDREW HEARNE his brother.

MARTIN HEARNE his nephew.

JOHNNY BACACH

PAUDEEN beggars.

BIDDY LALLY

NANNY

ACT I

Scene: *Interior of a coach builder's workshop. Parts of a gilded coach, among them an ornament representing the lion and the unicorn.* Thomas *working at a wheel.* Father John *coming from door of inner room.*

Father John. I have prayed over Martin. I have prayed a long time, but there is no move in him yet.

Thomas. You are giving yourself too much trouble, Father. It's as good for you to leave him alone till the doctor's bottle will come. If there is any cure at all for what is on him, it is likely the doctor will have it.

Father John. I think it is not doctor's medicine will help him in this case.

Thomas. It will, it will. The doctor has his business learned well. If Andrew had gone to him the time I bade him, and had not turned again to bring yourself to the house, it is likely Martin would be walking at this time. I am loth to trouble you, Father, when the business is not of your own sort. Any doctor at all should be able, and well able, to cure the falling sickness.

Father John. It is not any common sickness that is on him now.

Thomas. I thought at the first it was gone asleep he was. But when shaking him and roaring at him failed to rouse him, I knew well it was the falling sickness. Believe me, the doctor will reach it with his drugs.

Father John. Nothing but prayer can reach a soul that is so far beyond the world as his soul is at this moment.

Thomas. You are not saying that the life is gone out of him!

Father John. No, no, his life is in no danger. But where he himself, the spirit, the soul, is gone, I cannot say. It has gone beyond our imaginings. He is fallen into a trance.

Thomas. He used to be queer as a child, going asleep in the fields and coming back with talk of white horses he saw, and bright people like angels or whatever they were. But I mended that. I taught him to recognise stones beyond angels with a few strokes of a rod. I would never give in to visions or to trances.

Father John. We who hold the faith have no right to speak against trance or vision. St. Teresa had them, St. Benedict, St. Anthony, St. Columcille. St. Catherine of Sienna often lay a long time as if dead.

Thomas. That might be so in the olden time, but those things are gone out of the world now. Those that do their work fair and honest have no occasion to let the mind go rambling. What would send my nephew, Martin Hearne, into a trance, supposing trances to be in it, and he rubbing the gold on the lion and unicorn that he had taken in hand to make a good job of for the top of the coach?

Father John [*taking it up*]. It is likely it was that sent him off. The flashing of light upon it would be enough to throw one that had a disposition to it into a trance. There was a very saintly man, though he was not of our church, he wrote a great book called "Mysterium Magnum," was seven days in a trance. Truth, or whatever truth he found, fell upon him like a bursting shower, and he a poor tradesman at his work. It was a ray of sunlight on a pewter vessel that was the beginning of all. [*Goes to the door of inner room.*] There is no stir in him yet. It is either the best thing or the worst thing can happen to anyone that is happening to him now.

Thomas. And what in the living world can happen to a man that is asleep on his bed?

Father John. There are some would answer you that it is to those who are awake that nothing happens, and it is they that know nothing. He is gone where all have gone for supreme truth.

Thomas [*sitting down again and taking up tools*]. Well, maybe so. But work must go on and coach building must go on, and they will not go on the time there is too much attention given to dreams. A dream is a sort of a shadow, no profit in it to anyone at all. A coach now is a real thing and a thing that will last for generations and be made use of the last, and maybe turn to be a hen-roost at its latter end.

Father John. I think Andrew told me it was a dream of Martin's that led to the making of that coach.

Thomas. Well, I believe he saw gold in some dream, and it led him to want to make some golden thing, and coaches being the handiest, nothing would do him till he put the most of his fortune into the making of this golden coach. It turned out better than I thought, for some of the lawyers came looking at it at assize time, and through them it was heard of at Dublin Castle ... and who now has it ordered but the Lord Lieutenant! [Father John *nods.*] Ready it must be and sent off it must be by the end of the month. It is likely King George will be visiting Dublin, and it is he himself will be sitting in it yet.

Father John. Martin has been working hard at it, I know.

Thomas. You never saw a man work the way he did, day and night, near ever since the time, six months ago, he first came home from France.

Father John. I never thought he would be so good at a trade. I thought his mind was only set on books.

Thomas. He should be thankful to myself for that. Any person I will take in hand I make a clean job of them the same as I would make of any other thing in my yard, coach, half coach, hackney-coach, ass car, common car, post-chaise, calash, chariot on two wheels, on four wheels. Each one has the shape Thomas Hearne put on it, and it in his hands; and what I can do with wood and iron, why would I not be able to do it with flesh and blood, and it in a way my own?

Father John. Indeed I know you did your best for Martin.

Thomas. Every best. Checked him, taught him the trade, sent him to the monastery in France for to learn the language and to see the wide world; but who should know that if you did not know it, Father John, and I doing it according to your own advice?

Father John. I thought his nature needed spiritual guidance and teaching, the best that could be found.

Thomas. I thought myself it was best for him to be away for a while. There are too many wild lads about this place. He to have stopped here, he might have taken some fancies and got into some trouble, going against the Government, maybe, the same as Johnny Gibbons that is at this time an outlaw having a price upon his head.

Father John. That is so. That imagination of his might have taken fire here at home. It was better putting him with the Brothers, to turn it to imaginings of heaven.

Thomas. Well, I will soon have a good hardy tradesman made of him now that will live quiet and rear a family, and maybe be appointed coach builder to the royal family at the last.

Father John [*at window*]. I see your brother Andrew coming back from the doctor; he is stopping to talk with a troop of beggars that are sitting by the side of the road.

Thomas. There now is another that I have shaped. Andrew used to be a bit wild in his talk and in his ways, wanting to go rambling, not content to settle in the place where he was reared. But I kept a guard over him; I watched the time poverty gave him a nip, and then I settled him into the business. He never was so good a worker as Martin; he is too fond of wasting his time talking vanities. But he is middling handy, and he is always steady and civil to customers. I have no complaint worth while to be making this last twenty years against Andrew. [Andrew *comes in.*]

Andrew. Beggars there are outside going the road to the Kinvara fair. They were saying there is news that Johnny Gibbons is coming back from France on the quiet. The king's soldiers are watching the ports for him.

Thomas. Let you keep now, Andrew, to the business you have in hand. Will the doctor be coming himself, or did he send a bottle that will cure Martin?

Andrew. The doctor can't come, for he is down with lumbago in the back. He questioned me as to what ailed Martin, and he got a book to go looking

for a cure, and he began telling me things out of it, but I said I could not be carrying things of that sort in my head. He gave me the book then, and he has marks put in it for the places where the cures are ... wait now ... [*Reads.*] “Compound medicines are usually taken inwardly, or outwardly applied. Inwardly taken they should be either liquid or solid; outwardly they should be fomentations or sponges wet in some decoctions.”

Thomas. He had a right to have written it out himself upon a paper. Where is the use of all that?

Andrew. I think I moved the mark maybe ... here now is the part he was reading to me himself ... “the remedies for diseases belonging to the skins next the brain: headache, vertigo, cramp, convulsions, palsy, incubus, apoplexy, falling sickness.”

Thomas. It is what I bid you to tell him — that it was the falling sickness.

Andrew [*dropping book*]. O my dear, look at all the marks gone out of it. Wait now, I partly remember what he said ... a blister he spoke of ... or to be smelling hartshorn ... or the sneezing powder ... or if all fails, to try letting the blood.

Father John. All this has nothing to do with the real case. It is all waste of time.

Andrew. That is what I was thinking myself, Father. Sure it was I was the first to call out to you when I saw you coming down from the hillside and to bring you in to see what could you do. I would have more trust in your means than in any doctor’s learning. And in case you might fail to cure him, I have a cure myself I heard from my grandmother ... God rest her soul ...

and she told me she never knew it to fail. A person to have the falling sickness, to cut the top of his nails and a small share of the hair of his head, and to put it down on the floor and to take a harry-pin and drive it down with that into the floor and to leave it there. "That is the cure will never fail," she said, "to rise up any person at all having the falling sickness."

Father John [*hands on ears*]. I will go back to the hillside, I will go back to the hillside, but no, no, I must do what I can, I will go again, I will wrestle, I will strive my best to call him back with prayer. [*Goes into room and shuts door.*]

Andrew. It is queer Father John is sometimes, and very queer. There are times when you would say that he believes in nothing at all.

Thomas. If you wanted a priest, why did you not get our own parish priest that is a sensible man, and a man that you would know what his thoughts are? You know well the Bishop should have something against Father John to have left him through the years in that poor mountainy place, minding the few unfortunate people that were left out of the last famine. A man of his learning to be going in rags the way he is, there must be some good cause for that.

Andrew. I had all that in mind and I bringing him. But I thought he would have done more for Martin than what he is doing. To read a Mass over him I thought he would, and to be convulsed in the reading it, and some strange thing to have gone out with a great noise through the doorway.

Thomas. It would give no good name to the place such a thing to be happening in it. It is well enough for labouring men and for half-acre men.

It would be no credit at all such a thing to be heard of in this house, that is for coach building the capital of the county.

Andrew. If it is from the devil this sickness comes, it would be best to put it out whatever way it would be put out. But there might no bad thing be on the lad at all. It is likely he was with wild companions abroad, and that knocking about might have shaken his health. I was that way myself one time....

Thomas. Father John said that it was some sort of a vision or a trance, but I would give no heed to what he would say. It is his trade to see more than other people would see, the same as I myself might be seeing a split in a leather car hood that no other person would find out at all.

Andrew. If it is the falling sickness is on him, I have no objection to that ... a plain, straight sickness that was cast as a punishment on the unbelieving Jews. It is a thing that might attack one of a family and one of another family and not to come upon their kindred at all. A person to have it, all you have to do is not to go between him and the wind or fire or water. But I am in dread trance is a thing might run through the house, the same as the cholera morbus.

Thomas. In my belief there is no such thing as a trance. Letting on people do be to make the world wonder the time they think well to rise up. To keep them to their work is best, and not to pay much attention to them at all.

Andrew. I would not like trances to be coming on myself. I leave it in my will if I die without cause, a holly stake to be run through my heart the way I will lie easy after burial, and not turn my face downwards in my coffin. I tell you I leave it on you in my will.

Thomas. Leave thinking of your own comforts, Andrew, and give your mind to the business. Did the smith put the irons yet on to the shafts of this coach?

Andrew. I'll go see did he.

Thomas. Do so, and see did he make a good job of it. Let the shafts be sound and solid if they *are* to be studded with gold.

Andrew. They are, and the steps along with them ... glass sides for the people to be looking in at the grandeur of the satin within ... the lion and the unicorn crowning all ... it was a great thought Martin had the time he thought of making this coach!

Thomas. It is best for me go see the smith myself ... and leave it to no other one. You can be attending to that ass car out in the yard wants a new tyre in the wheel ... out in the rear of the yard it is. [*They go to door.*] To pay attention to every small thing, and to fill up every minute of time, shaping whatever you have to do, that is the way to build up a business. [*They go out.*]

Father John [*bringing in* Martin]. They are gone out now ... the air is fresher here in the workshop ... you can sit here for a while. You are now fully awake; you have been in some sort of a trance or a sleep.

Martin. Who was it that pulled at me? Who brought me back?

Father John. It is I, Father John, did it. I prayed a long time over you and brought you back.

Martin. You, Father John, to be so unkind! O leave me, leave me alone!

Father John. You are in your dream still.

Martin. It was no dream, it was real ... do you not smell the broken fruit ... the grapes ... the room is full of the smell.

Father John. Tell me what you have seen where you have been.

Martin. There were horses ... white horses rushing by, with white, shining riders ... there was a horse without a rider, and someone caught me up and put me upon him, and we rode away, with the wind, like the wind....

Father John. That is a common imagining. I know many poor persons have seen that.

Martin. We went on, on, on ... we came to a sweet-smelling garden with a gate to it ... and there were wheat-fields in full ear around ... and there were vineyards like I saw in France, and the grapes in bunches ... I thought it to be one of the town-lands of heaven. Then I saw the horses we were on had changed to unicorns, and they began trampling the grapes and breaking them ... I tried to stop them, but I could not.

Father John. That is strange, that is strange. What is it that brings to mind ... I heard it in some place, *Monocoros di Astris*, the Unicorn from the Stars.

Martin. They tore down the wheat and trampled it on stones, and then they tore down what were left of the grapes and crushed and bruised and trampled them ... I smelt the wine, it was flowing on every side ... then everything grew vague ... I cannot remember clearly ... everything was silent ... the trampling now stopped ... we were all waiting for some command. Oh! was it given! I was trying to hear it ... there was some one dragging, dragging me away from that ... I am sure there was a command

given ... and there was a great burst of laughter. What was it? What was the command? Everything seemed to tremble around me.

Father John. Did you awake then?

Martin. I do not think I did ... it all changed ... it was terrible, wonderful. I saw the unicorns trampling, trampling ... but not in the wine troughs.... Oh, I forget! Why did you waken me?

Father John. I did not touch you. Who knows what hands pulled you away? I prayed; that was all I did. I prayed very hard that you might awake. If I had not, you might have died. I wonder what it all meant. The unicorns ... what did the French monk tell me ... strength they meant ... virginal strength, a rushing, lasting, tireless strength.

Martin. They were strong.... Oh, they made a great noise with their trampling!

Father John. And the grapes ... what did they mean?... It puts me in mind of the psalm ... *Ex calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est.* It was a strange vision, a very strange vision, a very strange vision.

Martin. How can I get back to that place?

Father John. You must not go back, you must not think of doing that; that life of vision, of contemplation, is a terrible life, for it has far more of temptation in it than the common life. Perhaps it would have been best for you to stay under rules in the monastery.

Martin. I could not see anything so clearly there. It is back here in my own place the visions come, in the place where shining people used to laugh

around me and I a little lad in a bib.

Father John. You cannot know but it was from the Prince of this world the vision came. How can one ever know unless one follows the discipline of the church? Some spiritual director, some wise, learned man, that is what you want. I do not know enough. What am I but a poor banished priest with my learning forgotten, my books never handled, and spotted with the damp?

Martin. I will go out into the fields where you cannot come to me to awake me ... I will see that townland again ... I will hear that command. I cannot wait, I must know what happened, I must bring that command to mind again.

Father John [*putting himself between* Martin *and the door*]. You must have patience as the saints had it. You are taking your own way. If there is a command from God for you, you must wait His good time to receive it.

Martin. Must I live here forty years, fifty years ... to grow as old as my uncles, seeing nothing but common things, doing work ... some foolish work?

Father John. Here they are coming. It is time for me to go. I must think and I must pray. My mind is troubled about you. [*To* Thomas *as he and* Andrew *come in.*] Here he is; be very kind to him, for he has still the weakness of a little child.

[*Goes out.*]

Thomas. Are you well of the fit, lad?

Martin. It was no fit. I was away ... for a while ... no, you will not believe me if I tell you.

Andrew. I would believe it, Martin. I used to have very long sleeps myself and very queer dreams.

Thomas. You had, till I cured you, taking you in hand and binding you to the hours of the clock. The cure that will cure yourself, Martin, and will waken you, is to put the whole of your mind on to your golden coach, to take it in hand, and to finish it out of face.

Martin. Not just now. I want to think ... to try and remember what I saw, something that I heard, that I was told to do.

Thomas. No, but put it out of your mind. There is no man doing business that can keep two things in his head. A Sunday or a Holyday now you might go see a good hurling or a thing of the kind, but to be spreading out your mind on anything outside of the workshop on common days, all coach building would come to an end.

Martin. I don’t think it is building I want to do. I don’t think that is what was in the command.

Thomas. It is too late to be saying that the time you have put the most of your fortune in the business. Set yourself now to finish your job, and when it is ended, maybe I won’t begrudge you going with the coach as far as Dublin.

Andrew. That is it; that will satisfy him. I had a great desire myself, and I young, to go travelling the roads as far as Dublin. The roads are the great

things; they never come to an end. They are the same as the serpent having his tail swallowed in his own mouth.

Martin. It was not wandering I was called to. What was it? What was it?

Thomas. What you are called to, and what everyone having no great estate is called to, is to work. Sure the world itself could not go on without work.

Martin. I wonder if that is the great thing, to make the world go on. No, I don't think that is the great thing ... what does the Munster poet call it ... "this crowded slippery coach-loving world." I don't think I was told to work for that.

Andrew. I often thought that myself. It is a pity the stock of the Hearnes to be asked to do any work at all.

Thomas. Rouse yourself, Martin, and don't be talking the way a fool talks. You started making that golden coach, and you were set upon it, and you had me tormented about it. You have yourself wore out working at it and planning it and thinking of it, and at the end of the race, when you have the winning post in sight, and horses hired for to bring it to Dublin Castle, you go falling into sleeps and blathering about dreams, and we run to a great danger of letting the profit and the sale go by. Sit down on the bench now, and lay your hands to the work.

Martin [*sitting down*]. I will try. I wonder why I ever wanted to make it; it was no good dream set me doing that. [*He takes up wheel.*] What is there in a wooden wheel to take pleasure in it? Gilding it outside makes it no different.

Thomas. That is right now. You had some good plan for making the axle run smooth.

Martin [*letting wheel fall and putting his hands to his head*]. It is no use. [*Angrily.*] Why did you send the priest to awake me? My soul is my own and my mind is my own. I will send them to where I like. You have no authority over my thoughts.

Thomas. That is no way to be speaking to me. I am head of this business. Nephew or no nephew, I will have no one come cold or unwilling to the work.

Martin. I had better go. I am of no use to you. I am going.... I must be alone.... I will forget if I am not alone. Give me what is left of my money, and I will go out of this.

Thomas [*opening a press and taking out a bag and throwing it to him*]. There is what is left of your money! The rest of it you have spent on the coach. If you want to go, go, and I will not have to be annoyed with you from this out.

Andrew. Come now with me, Thomas. The boy is foolish, but it will soon pass over. He has not my sense to be giving attention to what you will say. Come along now; leave him for a while; leave him to me, I say; it is I will get inside his mind.

[*He leads* Thomas *out.* Martin, *when they have gone, sits down, taking up lion and unicorn.*]

Martin. I think it was some shining thing I saw.... What was it?

Andrew [*opening door and putting in his head*]. Listen to me, Martin.

Martin. Go away — no more talking — leave me alone.

Andrew [*coming in*]. Oh, but wait. I understand you. Thomas doesn't understand your thoughts, but I understand them. Wasn't I telling you I was just like you once?

Martin. Like me? Did you ever see the other things, the things beyond?

Andrew. I did. It is not the four walls of the house keep me content. Thomas doesn't know, oh, no, he doesn't know.

Martin. No, he has no vision.

Andrew. He has not, nor any sort of a heart for frolic.

Martin. He has never heard the laughter and the music beyond.

Andrew. He has not, nor the music of my own little flute. I have it hidden in the thatch outside.

Martin. Does the body slip from you as it does from me? They have not shut your window into eternity?

Andrew. Thomas never shut a window I could not get through. I knew you were one of my own sort. When I am sluggish in the morning Thomas says, "Poor Andrew is getting old." That is all he knows. The way to keep young is to do the things youngsters do. Twenty years I have been slipping away, and he never found me out yet!

Martin. That is what they call ecstasy, but there is no word that can tell out very plain what it means. That freeing of the mind from its thoughts. Those wonders we know; when we put them into words, the words seem as little like them as blackberries are like the moon and sun.

Andrew. I found that myself the time they knew me to be wild, and used to be asking me to say what pleasure did I find in cards, and women, and drink.

Martin. You might help me to remember that vision I had this morning, to understand it. The memory of it has slipped from me. Wait; it is coming back, little by little. I know that I saw the unicorns trampling, and then a figure, a many-changing figure, holding some bright thing. I knew something was going to happen or to be said, ... something that would make my whole life strong and beautiful like the rushing of the unicorns, and then, and then....

Johnny Bacach's Voice [*at window*]. A poor person I am, without food, without a way, without portion, without costs, without a person or a stranger, without means, without hope, without health, without warmth....

Andrew [*looking towards window*]. It is that troop of beggars; bringing their tricks and their thieveries they are to the Kinvara fair.

Martin [*impatiently*]. There is no quiet ... come to the other room. I am trying to remember....

[*They go to door of inner room, but* Andrew *stops him.*]

Andrew. They are a bad-looking fleet. I have a mind to drive them away, giving them a charity.

Martin. Drive them away or come away from their voices.

Another Voice. I put under the power of my prayer,

All that will give me help,

Rafael keep him Wednesday;

Sachiel feed him Thursday;

Hamiel provide him Friday;

Cassiel increase him Saturday.

Sure giving to us is giving to the Lord and laying up a store in the treasury of heaven.

Andrew. Whisht! He is coming in by the window! [Johnny B. *climbs in.*]

Johnny B. That I may never sin, but the place is empty!

Paudeen. Go in and see what can you make a grab at.

Johnny B. [*getting in*]. That every blessing I gave may be turned to a curse on them that left the place so bare! [*He turns things over.*] I might chance something in this chest if it was open.... [Andrew *begins creeping towards him.*]

Nanny [*outside*]. Hurry on now, you limping crabfish, you! We can't be stopping here while you'll boil stirabout!

Johnny B. [*seizing bag of money and holding it up in both hands*]. Look at this now, look! [Andrew *comes behind and seizes his arm.*]

Johnny B. [*letting bag fall with a crash*]. Destruction on us all!

Martin [running forward, seizes him. Heads disappear]. That is it! Oh, I remember! That is what happened! That is the command! Who was it sent you here with that command?

Johnny B. It was misery sent me in and starvation and the hard ways of the world.

Nanny [*outside*]. It was that, my poor child, and my one son only. Show mercy to him now, and he after leaving gaol this morning.

Martin [*to* Andrew.]. I was trying to remember it ... when he spoke that word it all came back to me. I saw a bright, many-changing figure ... it was holding up a shining vessel ... [*holds up arms*] then the vessel fell and was broken with a great crash ... then I saw the unicorns trampling it. They were breaking the world to pieces ... when I saw the cracks coming, I shouted for joy! And I heard the command, "Destroy, destroy; destruction is the life-giver; destroy."

Andrew. What will we do with him? He was thinking to rob you of your gold.

Martin. How could I forget it or mistake it? It has all come upon me now ... the reasons of it all, like a flood, like a flooded river.

Johnny B. [*weeping*]. It was the hunger brought me in and the drouth.

Martin. Were you given any other message? Did you see the unicorns?

Johnny B. I saw nothing and heard nothing; near dead I am with the fright I got and with the hardship of the gaol.

Martin. To destroy ... to overthrow all that comes between us and God, between us and that shining country. To break the wall, Andrew, the thing, whatever it is that comes between, but where to begin?...

Andrew. What is it you are talking about?

Martin. It may be that this man is the beginning. He has been sent ... the poor, they have nothing, and so they can see heaven as we cannot. He and his comrades will understand me. But now to give all men high hearts that they may all understand.

Johnny B. It's the juice of the grey barley will do that.

Andrew. To rise everybody's heart, is it? Is it that was your meaning?... If you will take the blame of it all, I'll do what you want. Give me the bag of money, then. [*He takes it up.*] Oh, I've a heart like your own! I'll lift the world too! The people will be running from all parts. Oh, it will be a great day in this district.

Johnny B. Will I go with you?

Martin. No, you must stay here; we have things to do and to plan.

Johnny B. Destroyed we all are with the hunger and the drouth.

Martin. Go then, get food and drink, whatever is wanted to give you strength and courage; gather your people together here; bring them all in.

We have a great thing to do. I have to begin ... I want to tell it to the whole world. Bring them in, bring them in, I will make the house ready.

ACT II

Scene: The same workshop a few minutes later. Martin. seen arranging mugs and bread, etc., on a table. Father John comes in, knocking at open door as he comes.

Martin. Come in, come in, I have got the house ready. Here is bread and meat ... everybody is welcome. [Hearing no answer, turns round.]

Father John. Martin, I have come back.... There is something I want to say to you.

Martin. You are welcome; there are others coming.... They are not of your sort, but all are welcome.

Father John. I have remembered suddenly something that I read when I was in the seminary.

Martin. You seem very tired.

Father John [*sitting down*]. I had almost got back to my own place when I thought of it. I have run part of the way. It is very important. It is about the trance that you have been in. When one is inspired from above, either in trance or in contemplation, one remembers afterwards all that one has seen and read. I think there must be something about it in St. Thomas. I know that I have read a long passage about it years ago. But, Martin, there is another kind of inspiration, or rather an obsession or possession. A diabolical power comes into one’s body or overshadows it. Those whose bodies are taken hold of in this way, jugglers and witches and the like, can often tell what is happening in distant places, or what is going to happen,

but when they come out of that state, they remember nothing. I think you said — —

Martin. That I could not remember.

Father John You remembered something, but not all. Nature is a great sleep; there are dangerous and evil spirits in her dreams, but God is above Nature. She is a darkness, but He makes everything clear — He is light.

Martin. All is clear now. I remember all, or all that matters to me. A poor man brought me a word, and I know what I have to do.

Father John. Ah, I understand; words were put into his mouth. I have read of such things. God sometimes uses some common man as His messenger.

Martin. You may have passed the man who brought it on the road. He left me but now.

Father John. Very likely, very likely, that is the way it happened. Some plain, unnoticed man has sometimes been sent with a command.

Martin. I saw the unicorns trampling in my dream. They were breaking the world. I am to destroy, that is the word the messenger spoke.

Father John. To destroy?

Martin. To bring again the old disturbed exalted life, the old splendour.

Father John. You are not the first that dream has come to. [*Gets up and walks up and down.*] It has been wandering here and there, calling now to this man, now to that other. It is a terrible dream.

Martin. Father John, you have had the same thought.

Father John. Men were holy then; there were saints everywhere, there was reverence, but now it is all work, business, how to live a long time. Ah, if one could change it all in a minute, even by war and violence.... There is a cell where St. Ciaran used to pray, if one could bring that time again.

Martin. Do not deceive me. You have had the command.

Father John. Why are you questioning me? You are asking me things that I have told to no one but my confessor.

Martin. We must gather the crowds together, you and I.

Father John. I have dreamed your dream; it was long ago. I had your vision.

Martin. And what happened?

Father John [*harshly*]. It was stopped. That was an end. I was sent to the lonely parish where I am, where there was no one I could lead astray. They have left me there. We must have patience; the world was destroyed by water, it has yet to be consumed by fire.

Martin. Why should we be patient? To live seventy years, and others to come after us and live seventy years it may be, and so from age to age, and all the while the old splendour dying more and more.

[A noise of shouting. Andrew, who has been standing at the door for a moment, comes in.]

Andrew. Martin says truth, and he says it well. Planing the side of a cart or a shaft, is that life? It is not. Sitting at a desk writing letters to the man that

wants a coach or to the man that won't pay for the one he has got, is that life, I ask you? Thomas arguing at you and putting you down, "Andrew, dear Andrew, did you put the tyre on that wheel yet?" Is that life? No, it is not. I ask you all what do you remember when you are dead? It's the sweet cup in the corner of the widow's drinking house that you remember. Ha, ha, listen to that shouting! That is what the lads in the village will remember to the last day they live!

Martin. Why are they shouting? What have you told them?

Andrew. Never you mind. You left that to me. You bade me to lift their hearts, and I did lift them. There is not one among them but will have his head like a blazing tar barrel before morning. What did your friend, the beggar, say? The juice of the grey barley, he said.

Father John. You accursed villain! You have made them drunk!

Andrew. Not at all, but lifting them to the stars. That is what Martin bade me to do, and there is no one can say I did not do it.

[*A shout at door and beggars push in a barrel. They all cry, "Hi! for the noble master!" and point at* Andrew.]

Johnny B. It's not him, it's that one!

[*Points at* Martin.]

Father John. Are you bringing this devil's work in at the very door? Go out of this, I say! Get out! Take these others with you!

Martin. No, no, I asked them in; they must not be turned out. They are my guests.

Father John. Drive them out of your uncle's house!

Martin. Come, Father, it is better for you to go. Go back to your own place. I have taken the command. It is better, perhaps, for you that you did not take it. [Martin *and* Father John *go out.*]

Biddy. It is well for that old lad he didn't come between ourselves and our luck. It would be right to have flayed him and to have made bags of his skin.

Nanny. What a hurry you are in to get your enough! Look at the grease on your frock yet with the dint of the dabs you put in your pocket! Doing cures and foretellings, is it? You starved pot picker, you!

Biddy. That you may be put up to-morrow to take the place of that decent son of yours that had the yard of the gaol wore with walking it till this morning!

Nanny. If he had, he had a mother to come to, and he would know her when he did see her, and that is what no son of your own could do, and he to meet you at the foot of the gallows!

Johnny B. If I did know you, I knew too much of you since the first beginning of my life! What reward did I ever get travelling with you? What store did you give me of cattle or of goods? What provision did I get from you by day or by night but your own bad character to be joined on to my own, and I following at your heels, and your bags tied round about me?

Nanny. Disgrace and torment on you! Whatever you got from me, it was more than any reward or any bit I ever got from the father you had, or any honourable thing at all, but only the hurt and the harm of the world and its shame!

Johnny B. What would he give you, and you going with him without leave? Crooked and foolish you were always, and you begging by the side of the ditch.

Nanny. Begging or sharing, the curse of my heart upon you! It's better off I was before ever I met with you, to my cost! What was on me at all that I did not cut a scourge in the wood to put manners and decency on you the time you were not hardened as you are!

Johnny B. Leave talking to me of your rods and your scourges! All you taught me was robbery, and it is on yourself and not on myself the scourges will be laid at the day of the recognition of tricks.

Paudeen. Faith, the pair of you together is better than Hector fighting before Troy!

Nanny. Ah, let you be quiet. It is not fighting we are craving, but the easing of the hunger that is on us and of the passion of sleep. Lend me a graineen of tobacco till I'll kindle my pipe — a blast of it will take the weight of the road off my heart.

[Andrew *gives her some*. Nanny. *grabs at it.*]

Biddy. No, but it's to myself you should give it. I that never smoked a pipe this forty year without saying the tobacco prayer. Let that one say, did ever she do that much?

Nanny. That the pain of your front tooth may be in your back tooth, you to be grabbing my share! [*They snap at tobacco.*]

Andrew. Pup, pup, pup. Don't be snapping and quarrelling now, and you so well treated in this house. It is strollers like yourselves should be for frolic and for fun. Have you ne'er a good song to sing, a song that will rise all our hearts?

Paudeen. Johnny Bacach is a good singer; it is what he used to be doing in the fairs, if the oakum of the gaol did not give him a hoarseness in the throat.

Andrew. Give it out so, a good song; a song will put courage and spirit into any man at all.

Johnny B. [*singing*].

Come, all ye airy bachelors,

A warning take by me:

A sergeant caught me fowling,

And fired his gun so free.

His comrades came to his relief,

And I was soon trepanned;

And, bound up like a woodcock,

Had fallen into their hands.

The judge said transportation;

The ship was on the strand;

They have yoked me to the traces

For to plough Van Dieman's land!

Andrew. That's no good of a song, but a melancholy sort of a song. I'd as lief be listening to a saw going through timber. Wait, now, till you will hear myself giving out a tune on the flute. [*Goes out for it.*]

Johnny B. It is what I am thinking there must be a great dearth and a great scarcity of good comrades in this place, a man like that youngster having means in his hand to be bringing ourselves and our rags into the house.

Paudeen. You think yourself very wise, Johnny Bacach. Can you tell me now who that man is?

Johnny B. Some decent lad, I suppose, with a good way of living and a mind to send up his name upon the roads.

Paudeen. You that have been gaoled this eight months know little of this countryside.... It isn't a limping stroller like yourself the boys would let come among them. But I know. I went to the drill a few nights, and I skinning kids for the mountainy men. In a quarry beyond the drill is ... they have their plans made.... It's the square house of the Browns is to be made an attack on and plundered. Do you know now who is the leader they are waiting for?

Johnny B. How would I know that?

Paudeen [*singing*].

Oh, Johnny Gibbons, my five hundred healths to you.

It is long you are away from us over the sea!

Johnny B. [*standing up excitedly*]. Sure that man could not be John Gibbons that is outlawed.

Paudeen. I asked news of him from the old lad [*points after* Andrew], and I bringing in the drink along with him. “Don’t be asking questions,” says he; “take the treat he gives you,” says he. “If a lad that had a high heart has a mind to rouse the neighbours,” says he, “and to stretch out his hand to all that pass the road, it is in France he learned it,” says he, “the place he is but lately come from, and where the wine does be standing open in tubs. Take your treat when you get it,” says he, “and make no delay, or all might be discovered and put an end to.”

Johnny B. He came over the sea from France! It is Johnny Gibbons surely, but it seems to me they were calling him by some other name.

Paudeen. A man on his keeping might go by a hundred names. Would he be telling it out to us that he never saw before, and we with that clutch of chattering women along with us? Here he is coming now. Wait till you see is he the lad I think him to be.

Martin [*coming in*]. I will make my banner; I will paint the Unicorn on it. Give me that bit of canvas; there is paint over here. We will get no help from the settled men — we will call to the lawbreakers, the tinkers — the sievemakers — the sheep-stealers. [*He begins to make banner.*]

Biddy. That sounds to be a queer name of an army. Ribbons I can understand, Whiteboys, Rightboys, Threshers, and Peep-o'-day, but Unicorns I never heard of before.

Johnny B. It is not a queer name, but a very good name. [*Takes up Lion and Unicorn.*] It is often you saw that before you in the dock. There is the Unicorn with the one horn, and what is it he is going against? The Lion of course. When he has the Lion destroyed, the Crown must fall and be shivered. Can't you see? It is the League of the Unicorns is the league that will fight and destroy the power of England and King George.

Paudeen. It is with that banner we will march and the lads in the quarry with us; it is they will have the welcome before him! It won't be long till we'll be attacking the Square House! Arms there are in it; riches that would smother the world; rooms full of guineas — we will put wax on our shoes walking them; the horses themselves shod with no less than silver!

Martin [*holding up the banner*]. There it is ready! We are very few now, but the army of the Unicorns will be a great army! [*To* Johnny B.] Why have you brought me the message? Can you remember any more? Has anything more come to you? Who told you to come to me? Who gave you the message?... Can you see anything or hear anything that is beyond the world?

Johnny B. I cannot. I don't know what do you want me to tell you at all.

Martin. I want to begin the destruction, but I don't know where to begin ... you do not hear any other voice?

Johnny B. I do not. I have nothing at all to do with freemasons or witchcraft.

Paudeen. It is Biddy Lally has to do with witchcraft. It is often she threw the cups and gave out prophecies the same as Columcille.

Martin. You are one of the knowledgeable women. You can tell me where it is best to begin, and what will happen in the end.

Biddy. I will foretell nothing at all. I rose out of it this good while, with the stiffness and the swelling it brought upon my joints.

Martin. If you have foreknowledge, you have no right to keep silent. If you do not help me, I may go to work in the wrong way. I know I have to destroy, but when I ask myself what I am to begin with, I am full of uncertainty.

Paudeen. Here now are the cups handy and the leavings in them.

Biddy [*taking cups and pouring one from another*]. Throw a bit of white money into the four corners of the house.

Martin. There! [*Throwing it.*]

Biddy. There can be nothing told without silver. It is not myself will have the profit of it. Along with that I will be forced to throw out gold.

Martin. There is a guinea for you. Tell me what comes before your eyes.

Biddy. What is it you are wanting to have news of?

Martin. Of what I have to go out against at the beginning ... there is so much ... the whole world, it may be.

Biddy [*throwing from one cup to another and looking*]. You have no care for yourself. You have been across the sea; you are not long back. You are coming within the best day of your life.

Martin. What is it? What is it I have to do?

Biddy. I see a great smoke, I see burning ... there is a great smoke overhead.

Martin. That means we have to burn away a great deal that men have piled up upon the earth. We must bring men once more to the wildness of the clean green earth.

Biddy. Herbs for my healing, the big herb and the little herb; it is true enough they get their great strength out of the earth.

Johnny B. Who was it the green sod of Ireland belonged to in the olden times? Wasn't it to the ancient race it belonged? And who has possession of it now but the race that came robbing over the sea? The meaning of that is to destroy the big houses and the towns, and the fields to be given back to the ancient race.

Martin. That is it. You don't put it as I do, but what matter? Battle is all.

Paudeen. Columcille said the four corners to be burned, and then the middle of the field to be burned. I tell you it was Columcille's prophecy said that.

Biddy. Iron handcuffs I see and a rope and a gallows, and it maybe is not for yourself I see it, but for some I have acquaintance with a good way

back.

Martin. That means the law. We must destroy the law. That was the first sin, the first mouthful of the apple.

Johnny B. So it was, so it was. The law is the worst loss. The ancient law was for the benefit of all. It is the law of the English is the only sin.

Martin. When there were no laws men warred on one another and man to man, not with one machine against another as they do now, and they grew hard and strong in body. They were altogether alive like Him that made them in His image, like people in that unfallen country. But presently they thought it better to be safe, as if safety mattered, or anything but the exaltation of the heart and to have eyes that danger had made grave and piercing. We must overthrow the laws and banish them!

Johnny B. It is what I say, to put out the laws is to put out the whole nation of the English. Laws for themselves they made for their own profit and left us nothing at all, no more than a dog or a sow.

Biddy. An old priest I see, and I would not say is he the one was here or another. Vexed and troubled he is, kneeling fretting, and ever fretting, in some lonesome, ruined place.

Martin. I thought it would come to that. Yes, the church too ... that is to be destroyed. Once men fought with their desires and their fears, with all that they call their sins, unhelped, and their souls became hard and strong. When we have brought back the clean earth and destroyed the law and the church, all life will become like a flame of fire, like a burning eye.... Oh, how to find words for it all ... all that is not life will pass away!

Johnny B. It is Luther's church he means, and the humpbacked discourse of Seaghan Calvin's Bible. So we will break it and make an end of it.

Martin [*rising*]. We will go out against the world and break it and unmake it. We are the army of the Unicorn from the Stars! We will trample it to pieces. We will consume the world, we will burn it away. Father John said the world has yet to be consumed by fire. Bring me fire.

Andrew. Here is Thomas coming! [*All except* Martin *hurry into next room.* Thomas *comes in.*]

Thomas. Come with me, Martin. There is terrible work going on in the town! There is mischief gone abroad! Very strange things are happening!

Martin. What are you talking of? What has happened?

Thomas. Come along, I say; it must be put a stop to! We must call to every decent man!... It is as if the devil himself had gone through the town on a blast and set every drinking house open!

Martin. I wonder how that has happened. Can it have anything to do with Andrew's plan?

Thomas. Are you giving no heed to what I'm saying? There is not a man, I tell you, in the parish, and beyond the parish, but has left the work he was doing, whether in the field or in the mill.

Martin. Then all work has come to an end? Perhaps that was a good thought of Andrew's.

Thomas. There is not a man has come to sensible years that is not drunk or drinking! My own labourers and my own serving-man are sitting on counters and on barrels! I give you my word the smell of the spirits and the porter and the shouting and the cheering within made the hair to rise up on my scalp.

Martin. And there is not one of them that does not feel that he could bridle the four winds.

Thomas [*sitting down in despair*]. You are drunk, too. I never thought you had a fancy for it.

Martin. It is hard for you to understand. You have worked all your life. You have said to yourself every morning, "What is to be done to-day?" and when you are tired out you have thought of the next day's work. If you gave yourself an hour's idleness, it was but that you might work the better. Yet it is only when one has put work away that one begins to live.

Thomas. It is those French wines that did it.

Martin. I have been beyond the earth, in paradise, in that happy townland. I have seen the shining people. They were all doing one thing or another, but not one of them was at work. All that they did was but the overflowing of their idleness, and their days were a dance bred of the secret frenzy of their hearts, or a battle where the sword made a sound that was like laughter.

Thomas. You went away sober from out of my hands; they had a right to have minded you better.

Martin. No man can be alive, and what is paradise but fulness of life, if whatever he sets his hand to in the daylight cannot carry him from

exaltation to exaltation, and if he does not rise into the frenzy of contemplation in the night silence. Events that are not begotten in joy are misbegotten and darken the world, and nothing is begotten in joy if the joy of a thousand years has not been crushed into a moment.

Thomas. And I offered to let you go to Dublin in the coach! [Andrew *and the beggars have returned cautiously.*]

Martin [*giving banner to* Paudeen]. Give me the lamp. The lamp has not yet been lighted, and the world is to be consumed! [*Goes into inner room.*]

Thomas [*seeing* Andrew]. Is it here you are, Andrew? What are the beggars doing? Was this door thrown open, too?... Why did you not keep order? I will go for the constables to help us!

Andrew. You will not find them to help you. They were scattering themselves through the drinking houses of the town; and why wouldn't they?

Thomas. Are you drunk, too? You are worse than Martin. You are a disgrace.

Andrew. Disgrace yourself! Coming here to be making an attack on me and badgering me and disparaging me. And what about yourself that turned me to be a hypocrite?

Thomas. What are you saying?

Andrew. You did, I tell you. Weren't you always at me to be regular and to be working and to be going through the day and the night without company and to be thinking of nothing but the trade? What did I want with a trade? I

got a sight of the fairy gold one time in the mountains. I would have found it again and brought riches from it but for you keeping me so close to the work.

Thomas. Oh, of all the ungrateful creatures! You know well that I cherished you, leading you to live a decent, respectable life.

Andrew. You never had respect for the ancient ways. It is after the mother you take it, that was too soft and too lumpish, having too much of the English in her blood. Martin is a Hearne like myself. It is he has the generous heart! It is not Martin would make a hypocrite of me and force me to do night walking secretly, watching to be back by the setting of the seven stars! [*He begins to play his flute.*]

Thomas. I will turn you out of this, yourself and this filthy troop! I will have them lodged in gaol.

Johnny B. Filthy troop, is it? Mind yourself! The change is coming! The pikes will be up and the traders will go down!

[*All seize him and sing.*]

When the Lion shall lose his strength,

And the braket thistle begin to pine, —

The harp shall sound sweet, sweet at length

Between the eight and the nine!

Thomas. Let me out of this, you villains!

Nanny. We'll make a sieve of holes of you, you old bag of treachery!

Biddy. How well you threatened us with gaol! You skim of a weasel's milk!

Johnny B. You heap of sicknesses! You blinking hangman! That you may never die till you'll get a blue hag for a wife!

[Martin *comes back with lighted lamp.*]

Martin. Let him go. [*They let* Thomas *go and fall back.*] Spread out the banner. The moment has come to begin the war.

Johnny B. Up with the Unicorn and destroy the Lion! Success to Johnny Gibbons and all good men!

Martin. Heap all those things together there. Heap those pieces of the coach one upon another. Put that straw under them. It is with this flame I will begin the work of destruction. All nature destroys and laughs.

Thomas. Destroy your own golden coach!

Martin [*kneeling*]. I am sorry to go a way that you do not like, and to do a thing that will vex you. I have been a great trouble to you since I was a child in the house, and I am a great trouble to you yet. It is not my fault. I have been chosen for what I have to do. [*Stands up.*] I have to free myself first and those that are near me. The love of God is a very terrible thing!

[Thomas *tries to stop him, but is prevented by tinkers*. Martin *takes a wisp of straw and lights it.*]

We will destroy all that can perish! It is only the soul that can suffer no injury. The soul of man is of the imperishable substance of the stars!

[*He throws his wisp into the heap. It blazes up.*]

ACT III

Scene: *Before dawn a few hours later. A wild, rocky place.* Nanny *and* Biddy Lally *squatting by fire. Rich stuffs, etc., strewn about.* Paudeen *sitting, watching by* Martin, *who is lying, as if dead, a sack over him.*

Nanny [*to* Paudeen]. Well, you are great heroes and great warriors and great lads altogether to have put down the Browns the way you did, yourselves and the Whiteboys of the quarry. To have ransacked the house and have plundered it! Look at the silks and the satins and the grandeurs I brought away! Look at that now! [*Holds up a velvet cloak.*] It's a good little jacket for myself will come out of it. It's the singers will be stopping their songs and the jobbers turning from their cattle in the fairs to be taking a view of the laces of it and the buttons! It's my far-off cousins will be drawing from far and near!

Biddy. There was not so much gold in it all as what they were saying there was. Or maybe that fleet of Whiteboys had the place ransacked before we ourselves came in. Bad cess to them that put it in my mind to go gather up the full of my bag of horseshoes out of the forge. Silver they were saying they were, pure white silver; and what are they in the end but only hardened iron! A bad end to them! [*Flings away horseshoes.*] The time I will go robbing big houses again it will not be in the light of the full moon I will go doing it, that does be causing every common thing to shine out as if for a deceit and a mockery. It's not shining at all they are at this time, but duck yellow and dark.

Nanny. To leave the big house blazing after us, it was that crowned all! Two houses to be burned to ashes in the one night. It is likely the servant-girls

were rising from the feathers, and the cocks crowing from the rafters for seven miles around, taking the flames to be the whitening of the dawn.

Biddy. It is the lad is stretched beyond you have to be thankful to for that. There was never seen a leader was his equal for spirit and for daring! Making a great scatter of the guards the way he did! Running up roofs and ladders, the fire in his hand, till you'd think he would be apt to strike his head against the stars.

Nanny. I partly guessed death was near him, and the queer shining look he had in his two eyes, and he throwing sparks east and west through the beams. I wonder now was it some inward wound he got, or did some hardy lad of the Browns give him a tip on the skull unknownst in the fight? It was I myself found him, and the troop of the Whiteboys gone, and he lying by the side of a wall as weak as if he had knocked a mountain. I failed to waken him, trying him with the sharpness of my nails, and his head fell back when I moved it, and I knew him to be spent and gone.

Biddy. It's a pity you not to have left him where he was lying, and said no word at all to Paudeen or to that son you have, that kept us back from following on, bringing him here to this shelter on sacks and upon poles.

Nanny. What way could I help letting a screech out of myself and the life but just gone out of him in the darkness, and not a living Christian by his side but myself and the great God?

Biddy. It's on ourselves the vengeance of the red soldiers will fall, they to find us sitting here the same as hares in a tuft. It would be best for us follow after the rest of the army of the Whiteboys.

Nanny. Whist, I tell you! The lads are cracked about him. To get but the wind of the word of leaving him, it's little but they'd knock the head off the two of us. Whist!

[*Enter* Johnny B. *with candles.*]

Johnny B. [*standing over* Martin]. Wouldn't you say now there was some malice or some venom in the air, that is striking down one after the other the whole of the heroes of the Gael?

Paudeen. It makes a person be thinking of the four last ends, death and judgment, heaven and hell. Indeed and indeed my heart lies with him. It is well I knew what man he was under his by-name and his disguise. [*Sings.*]

Oh, Johnny Gibbons, it's you were the prop to us!

You to have left us we are put astray!

Johnny B. It is lost we are now and broken to the end of our days. There is no satisfaction at all but to be destroying the English; and where now will we get so good a leader again? Lay him out fair and straight upon a stone, till I will let loose the secret of my heart keening him! [*Sets out candles on a rack, propping them with stones.*]

Nanny. Is it mould candles you have brought to set around him, Johnny Bacach? It is great riches you should have in your pocket to be going to those lengths and not to be content with dips.

Johnny B. It is lengths I will not be going to the time the life will be gone out of your own body. It is not your corpse I will be wishful to hold in honour the way I hold this corpse in honour.

Nanny. That's the way always: there will be grief and quietness in the house if it is a young person has died, but funning and springing and tricking one another if it is an old person's corpse is in it. There is no compassion at all for the old.

Paudeen. It is he would have got leave for the Gael to be as high as the Gall. Believe me, he was in the prophecies. Let you not be comparing yourself with the like of him.

Nanny. Why wouldn't I be comparing myself? Look at all that was against me in the world; would you be matching me against a man of his sort that had the people shouting for him and that had nothing to do but to die and to go to heaven?

Johnny B. The day you go to heaven that you may never come back alive out of it! But it is not yourself will ever hear the saints hammering at their musics! It is you will be moving through the ages chains upon you, and you in the form of a dog or a monster! I tell you, that one will go through purgatory as quick as lightning through a thorn bush.

Nanny. That's the way, that's the way:

Three that are watching my time to run

The worm, the devil, and my son.

To see a loop around their neck

It's that would make my heart to leap!

Johnny B. Five white candles. I wouldn't begrudge them to him, indeed. If he had held out and held up, it is my belief he would have freed Ireland!

Paudeen. Wait till the full light of the day and you'll see the burying he'll have. It is not in this place we will be waking him. I'll make a call to the two hundred Ribbons he was to lead on to the attack on the barracks at Aughanish. They will bring him marching to his grave upon the hill. He had surely some gift from the other world, I wouldn't say but he had power from the other side.

Andrew [*coming in, very shaky*]. Well, it was a great night he gave to the village, and it is long till it will be forgotten. I tell you the whole of the neighbours are up against him. There is no one at all this morning to set the mills going. There was no bread baked in the night-time; the horses are not fed in the stalls; the cows are not milked in the sheds. I met no man able to make a curse this night but he put it on my own head and on the head of the boy that is lying there before us.... Is there no sign of life in him at all?

Johnny B. What way would there be a sign of life and the life gone out of him this three hours or more?

Andrew. He was lying in his sleep for a while yesterday, and he wakened again after another while.

Nanny. He will not waken. I tell you I held his hand in my own and it getting cold as if you were pouring on it the coldest cold water, and no running in his blood. He is gone sure enough, and the life is gone out of him.

Andrew. Maybe so, maybe so. It seems to me yesterday his cheeks were bloomy all the while, and now he is as pale as wood-ashes. Sure we all must come to it at the last. Well, my white-headed darling, it is you were the bush among us all, and you to be cut down in your prime. Gentle and simple, everyone liked you. It is no narrow heart you had; it is you were for spending and not for getting. It is you made a good wake for yourself, scattering your estate in one night only in beer and in wine for the whole province; and that you may be sitting in the middle of paradise and in the chair of the graces!

Johnny B. Amen to that. It's pity I didn't think the time I sent for yourself to send the little lad of a messenger looking for a priest to overtake him. It might be in the end the Almighty is the best man for us all!

Andrew. Sure I sent him on myself to bid the priest to come. Living or dead, I would wish to do all that is rightful for the last and the best of my own race and generation.

Biddy [*jumping up*]. Is it the priest you are bringing in among us? Where is the sense in that? Aren't we robbed enough up to this with the expense of the candles and the like?

Johnny B. If it is that poor, starved priest he called to that came talking in secret signs to the man that is gone, it is likely he will ask nothing for what he has to do. There is many a priest is a Whiteboy in his heart.

Nanny. I tell you, if you brought him tied in a bag he would not say an Our Father for you, without you having a half crown at the top of your fingers.

Biddy. There is no priest is any good at all but a spoiled priest; a one that would take a drop of drink, it is he would have courage to face the hosts of trouble. Rout them out he would, the same as a shoal of fish from out the weeds. It's best not to vex a priest, or to run against them at all.

Nanny. It's yourself humbled yourself well to one the time you were sick in the gaol and had like to die, and he bade you to give over the throwing of the cups.

Biddy. Ah, plaster of Paris I gave him. I took to it again and I free upon the roads.

Nanny. Much good you are doing with it to yourself or any other one. Aren't you after telling that corpse no later than yesterday that he was coming within the best day of his life?

Johnny B. Whist, let ye! Here is the priest coming.

[Father John *comes in.*]

Father John. It is surely not true that he is dead?

Johnny B. The spirit went from him about the middle hour of the night. We brought him here to this sheltered place. We were loth to leave him without friends.

Father John. Where is he?

Johnny B. [*taking up sacks*]. Lying there, stiff and stark. He has a very quiet look, as if there was no sin at all or no great trouble upon his mind.

Father John [*kneels and touches him*]. He is not dead.

Biddy [*pointing to* Nanny]. He is dead. If it was letting on he was, he would not have let that one rob him and search him the way she did.

Father John. It has the appearance of death, but it is not death. He is in a trance.

Paudeen. Is it heaven and hell he is walking at this time to be bringing back newses of the sinners in pain?

Biddy. I was thinking myself it might away he was, riding on white horses with the riders of the forths.

Johnny B. He will have great wonders to tell out the time he will rise up from the ground. It is a pity he not to waken at this time and to lead us on to overcome the troop of the English. Sure those that are in a trance get strength that they can walk on water.

Andrew. It was Father John wakened him yesterday the time he was lying in the same way. Wasn't I telling you it was for that I called to him?

Biddy. Waken him now till they'll see did I tell any lie in my foretelling. I knew well by the signs he was coming within the best day of his life.

Paudeen. And not dead at all! We'll be marching to attack Dublin itself within a week. The horn will blow for him, and all good men will gather to him. Hurry on, Father, and waken him.

Father John. I will not waken him. I will not bring him back from where he is.

Johnny B. And how long will it be before he will waken of himself?

Father John. Maybe to-day, maybe to-morrow; it is hard to be certain.

Biddy. If it is *away* he is, he might be away seven years. To be lying like a stump of a tree and using no food and the world not able to knock a word out of him, I know the signs of it well.

Johnny B. We cannot be waiting and watching through seven years. If the business he has started is to be done, we have to go on here and now. The time there is any delay, that is the time the Government will get information. Waken him now, Father, and you'll get the blessing of the generations.

Father John. I will not bring him back. God will bring him back in His own good time. For all I know he may be seeing the hidden things of God.

Johnny B. He might slip away in his dream. It is best to raise him up now.

Andrew. Waken him, Father John. I thought he was surely dead this time; and what way could I go face Thomas through all that is left of my lifetime after me standing up to face him the way I did? And if I do take a little drop of an odd night, sure I'd be very lonesome if I did not take it. All the world knows it's not for love of what I drink, but for love of the people that do be with me! Waken him, Father, or maybe I would waken him myself. [*Shakes him.*]

Father John. Lift your hand from touching him. Leave him to himself and to the power of God.

Johnny B. If you will not bring him back, why wouldn't we ourselves do it? Go on now, it is best for you to do it yourself.

Father John. I woke him yesterday. He was angry with me; he could not get to the heart of the command.

Johnny B. If he did not, he got a command from myself that satisfied him, and a message.

Father John. He did ... he took it from you ... and how do I know what devil's message it may have been that brought him into that devil's work, destruction and drunkenness and burnings! That was not a message from heaven! It was I awoke him; it was I kept him from hearing what was maybe a divine message, a voice of truth; and he heard you speak, and he believed the message was brought by you. You have made use of your deceit and his mistaking ... you have left him without house or means to support him, you are striving to destroy and to drag him to entire ruin. I will not help you, I would rather see him die in his trance and go into God's hands than awake him and see him go into hell's mouth with vagabonds and outcasts like you!

Johnny B. [*turning to* Biddy]. You should have knowledge, Biddy Lally, of the means to bring back a man that is away.

Biddy. The power of the earth will do it through its herbs, and the power of the air will do it kindling fire into flame.

Johnny B. Rise up and make no delay. Stretch out and gather a handful of an herb that will bring him back from whatever place he is in.

Biddy. Where is the use of herbs and his teeth clenched the way he could not use them?

Johnny B. Take fire so in the devil's name and put it to the soles of his feet. [*Takes lighted sod from fire.*]

Father John. Let him alone, I say!

[*Dashes away the sod.*]

Johnny B. I will not leave him alone! I will not give in to leave him swooning there and the country waiting for him to awake!

Father John. I tell you I awoke him! I sent him into thieves' company! I will not have him wakened again and evil things, it may be, waiting to take hold of him! Back from him, back, I say! Will you dare to lay a hand on me? You cannot do it! You cannot touch him against my will!

Biddy. Mind yourself; don't be bringing us under the curse of the church.

[Johnny *falls back.* Martin *moves.*]

Father John. It is God has him in His care. It is He is awaking him. [Martin *has risen to his elbow.*] Do not touch him, do not speak to him, he may be hearing great secrets.

Martin. That music, I must go nearer ... sweet, marvellous music ... louder than the trampling of the unicorns ... far louder, though the mountain is shaking with their feet ... high, joyous music.

Father John. Hush, he is listening to the music of heaven!

Martin. Take me to you, musicians, wherever you are! I will go nearer to you; I hear you better now, more and more joyful; that is strange, it is strange.

Father John. He is getting some secret.

Martin. It is the music of paradise, that is certain, somebody said that. It is certainly the music of paradise. Ah, now I hear, now I understand. It is made of the continual clashing of swords!

Johnny B. That is the best music. We will clash them sure enough. We will clash our swords and our pikes on the bayonets of the red soldiers. It is well you rose up from the dead to lead us! Come on now, come on!

Martin. Who are you? Ah, I remember.... Where are you asking me to come to?

Paudeen. To come on, to be sure, to the attack on the barracks at Aughanish. To carry on the work you took in hand last night.

Martin. What work did I take in hand last night? Oh, yes, I remember ... some big house ... we burned it down.... But I had not understood the vision when I did that. I had not heard the command right. That was not the work I was sent to do.

Paudeen. Rise up now and bid us what to do. Your great name itself will clear the road before you. It is you yourself will have freed all Ireland before the stooks will be in stacks!

Martin. Listen, I will explain ... I have misled you. It is only now I have the whole vision plain. As I lay there I saw through everything, I know all. It was but a frenzy, that going out to burn and to destroy. What have I to do with the foreign army? What I have to pierce is the wild heart of time. My business is not reformation but revelation.

Johnny B. If you are going to turn back now from leading us, you are no better than any other traitor that ever gave up the work he took in hand. Let you come and face now the two hundred men you brought out, daring the power of the law last night, and give them your reason for failing them.

Martin. I was mistaken when I set out to destroy church and law. The battle we have to fight is fought out in our own minds. There is a fiery moment, perhaps once in a lifetime, and in that moment we see the only thing that matters. It is in that moment the great battles are lost and won, for in that moment we are a part of the host of heaven.

Paudeen. Have you betrayed us to the naked hangman with your promises and with your drink? If you brought us out here to fail us and to ridicule us, it is the last day you will live!

Johnny B. The curse of my heart on you! It would be right to send you to your own place on the flagstone of the traitors in hell. When once I have made an end of you, I will be as well satisfied to be going to my death for it as if I was going home!

Martin. Father John, Father John, can you not hear? Can you not see? Are you blind? Are you deaf?

Father John. What is it? What is it?

Martin. There on the mountain, a thousand white unicorns trampling; a thousand riders with their swords drawn ... the swords clashing! Oh, the sound of the swords, the sound of the clashing of the swords! [*He goes slowly off stage.*]

[Johnny B. *takes up a stone to throw at him.*]

Father John [*seizing his arm*]. Stop ... do you not see he is beyond the world?

Biddy. Keep your hand off him, Johnny Bacach. If he is gone wild and cracked, that's natural. Those that have been wakened from a trance on a sudden are apt to go bad and light in the head.

Paudeen. If it is madness is on him, it is not he himself should pay the penalty.

Biddy. To prey on the mind it does, and rises into the head. There are some would go over any height and would have great power in their madness. It is maybe to some secret cleft he is going to get knowledge of the great cure for all things, or of the Plough that was hidden in the old times, the Golden Plough.

Paudeen. It seemed as if he was talking through honey. He had the look of one that had seen great wonders. It is maybe among the old heroes of Ireland he went raising armies for our help.

Father John. God take him in His care and keep him from lying spirits and from all delusions.

Johnny B. We have got candles here, Father. We had them to put around his body. Maybe they would keep away the evil things of the air.

Paudeen. Light them so, and he will say out a Mass for him the same as in a lime-washed church.

[*They light the candles on the rock.* Thomas *comes in.*]

Thomas. Where is he? I am come to warn him. The destruction he did in the night-time has been heard of. The soldiers are out after him and the constables ... there are two of the constables not far off ... there are others on every side ... they heard he was here in the mountain ... where is he?

Father John. He has gone up the path.

Thomas. Hurry after him! Tell him to hide himself ... this attack he had a hand in is a hanging crime.... Tell him to hide himself, to come to me when all is quiet ... bad as his doings are, he is my own brother's son; I will get him on to a ship that will be going to France.

Father John. That will be best; send him back to the Brothers and to the wise Bishops. They can unravel this tangle. I cannot; I cannot be sure of the truth.

Thomas. Here are the constables; he will see them and get away.... Say no word.... The Lord be praised that he is out of sight.

[Constables *come in.*]

Constable. The man we are looking for, where is he? He was seen coming here along with you. You have to give him up into the power of the law.

Johnny B. We will not give him up! Go back out of this or you will be sorry.

Paudeen. We are not in dread of you or the like of you.

Biddy. Throw them down over the rocks!

Nanny. Give them to the picking of the crows!

All. Down with the law!

Father John. Hush! He is coming back. [*To* Constables.] Stop, stop ... leave him to himself. He is not trying to escape; he is coming towards you.

Paudeen. There is a sort of a brightness about him. I misjudged him calling him a traitor. It is not to this world he belongs at all. He is over on the other side.

[Martin *has come in. He stands higher than the others upon some rocks.*]

Martin. *Ex calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est!*

Father John. I must know what he has to say. It is not from himself he is speaking.

Martin. Father John, heaven is not what we have believed it to be. It is not quiet; it is not singing and making music and all strife at an end. I have seen it, I have been there. The lover still loves, but with a greater passion; and the rider still rides, but the horse goes like the wind and leaps the ridges; and the battle goes on always, always. That is the joy of heaven, continual battle. I thought the battle was here, and that the joy was to be found here on earth, that all one had to do was to bring again the old, wild earth of the stories, but no, it is not here; we shall not come to that joy, that battle, till we have put out the senses, everything that can be seen and handled, as I put out this candle. [*He puts out candle.*] We must put out the whole world as I put out this candle [*he puts out candle*]; we must put out the light of the stars and the light of the sun and the light of the moon [*he puts out the remaining candles and comes down to where the others are*], till we have brought everything to nothing once again. I saw in a broken vision, but now

all is clear to me. Where there is nothing, where there is nothing ... there is God!

Constable. Now we will take him!

Johnny B. We will never give him up to the law!

Paudeen. Make your escape! We will not let you be followed.

[*They struggle with* Constables; *the women help them; all disappear, struggling. There is a shot.* Martin *falls dead. Beggars come back with a shout.*]

Johnny B. We have done for them; they will not meddle with you again.

Paudeen. Oh, he is down!

Father John. He is shot through the breast. Oh, who has dared meddle with a soul that was in the tumults on the threshold of sanctity?

Johnny B. It was that gun went off and I striking it from the constable's hand.

Martin [*looking at his hand, on which there is blood*]. Ah, that is blood! I fell among the rocks. It is a hard climb. It is a long climb to the vineyards of Eden. Help me up. I must go on. The Mountain of Abiegnos is very high ... but the vineyards ... the vineyards!

[*He falls back, dead. The men uncover their heads.*]

Paudeen [*to* Biddy]. It was you misled him with your foretelling that he was coming within the best day of his life.

Johnny B. Madness on him or no madness, I will not leave that body to the law to be buried with a dog's burial or brought away and maybe hanged upon a tree. Lift him on the sacks; bring him away to the quarry; it is there on the hillside the boys will give him a great burying, coming on horses and bearing white rods in their hands.

[*They lift him and carry the body away, singing.*]

Our hope and our darling, our heart dies with you.

You to have failed us, we are foals astray!

Father John. He is gone, and we can never know where that vision came from. I cannot know; the wise Bishops would have known.

Thomas [*taking up banner*]. To be shaping a lad through his lifetime, and he to go his own way at the last, and a queer way. It is very queer the world itself is, whatever shape was put upon it at the first!

Andrew. To be too headstrong and too open, that is the beginning of trouble. To keep to yourself the thing that you know, and to do in quiet the thing you want to do, there would be no disturbance at all in the world, all people to bear that in mind!

Curtain

The Green Helmet

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LAEGAIRE
LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
CONALL
CONALL'S WIFE
CUCHULAIN
LAEG, Cuchulain's chariot-driver
EMER
RED MAN, *A Spirit*
Horse Boys and Scullions, Black Men, etc.

THE GREEN HELMET

SCENE: A house made of logs. There are two windows at the back and a door which cuts off one of the corners of the room. Through the door one can see low rocks which make the ground outside higher than it is within, and beyond the rocks a misty moon-lit sea. Through the windows one can see nothing but the sea. There is a great chair at the opposite side to the door, and in front of it a table with cups and a flagon of ale. Here and there are stools.

At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange red and the chairs and tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black. The rocks are black with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous, and all the characters except the RED MAN and the Black Men are dressed in various shades of green, one or two with touches of purple which look nearly black. The Black Men all wear dark purple and have eared caps, and at the end their eyes should look green from the reflected light of the sea. The RED MAN is altogether in red. He is very tall, and his height increased by horns on the Green Helmet. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.

LAEGAIRE
What is that? I had thought that I saw, though but in the wink of an
eye,
A cat-headed man out of Connaught go pacing and spitting by;
But that could not be.

CONALL
You have dreamed it--there's nothing out there.
I killed them all before daybreak--I hoked them out of their lair;

I cut off a hundred heads with a single stroke of my sword,
And then I danced on their graves and carried away their hoard.

LAEGAIRE
Does anything stir on the sea?

CONALL
Not even a fish or a gull:
I can see for a mile or two, now that the moon's at the full.

[A distant shout.]

LAEGAIRE
Ah--there--there is someone who calls us.

CONALL
But from the landward side,
And we have nothing to fear that has not come up from the tide;
The rocks and the bushes cover whoever made that noise,
But the land will do us no harm.

LAEGAIRE
It was like Cuchulain's voice.

CONALL
But that's an impossible thing.

LAEGAIRE
An impossible thing indeed.

CONALL
For he will never come home, he has all that he could need
In that high windy Scotland--good luck in all that he does.
Here neighbour wars on neighbour and why there is no man knows,
And if a man is lucky all wish his luck away,
And take his good name from him between a day and a day.

LAEGAIRE
I would he'd come for all that, and make his young wife know
That though she may be his wife, she has no right to go
Before your wife and my wife, as she would have gone last night
Had they not caught at her dress, and pulled her as was right;
And she makes light of us though our wives do all that they can.
She spreads her tail like a peacock and praises none but her man.

CONALL
A man in a long green cloak that covers him up to the chin
Comes down through the rocks and hazels.

LAEGAIRE
Cry out that he cannot come in.

CONALL
He must look for his dinner elsewhere, for no one alive shall stop
Where a shame must alight on us two before the dawn is up.

LAEGAIRE
No man on the ridge of the world must ever know that but us two.

CONALL
[*Outside door*]

Go away, go away, go away.

YOUNG MAN
[*Outside door*]

I will go when the night is through
And I have eaten and slept and drunk to my heart's delight.

CONALL
A law has been made that none shall sleep in this house to-night.

YOUNG MAN
Who made that law?

CONALL
We made it, and who has so good a right?
Who else has to keep the house from the Shape-Changers till day?

YOUNG MAN
Then I will unmake the law, so get you out of the way.

[*He pushes past CONALL and goes into house*]

CONALL
I thought that no living man could have pushed me from the door,
Nor could any living man do it but for the dip in the floor;
And had I been rightly ready there's no man living could do it,
Dip or no dip.

LAEGAIRE
Go out--if you have your wits, go out,
A stone's throw further on you will find a big house where
Our wives will give you supper, and you'll sleep sounder there,
For it's a luckier house.

YOUNG MAN
I'll eat and sleep where I will.

LAEGAIRE
Go out or I will make you.

YOUNG MAN
[Forcing up LAEGAIRE'S arm, passing him and putting his shield on the wall over the chair]

Not till I have drunk my fill.
But may some dog defend me for a cat of wonder's up.
Laegaire and Conall are here, the flagon full to the top,
And the cups--

LAEGAIRE
It is Cuchulain.

CUCHULAIN
The cups are dry as a bone.

[*He sits on chair and drinks*]

CONALL
Go into Scotland again, or where you will, but begone

From this unlucky country that was made when the devil spat.

CUCHULAIN
If I lived here a hundred years, could a worse thing come than that
Laegaire and Conall should know me and bid me begone to my face?

CONALL
We bid you begone from a house that has fallen on shame and disgrace.

CUCHULAIN
I am losing patience, Conall--I find you stuffed with pride,
The flagon full to the brim, the front door standing wide;
You'd put me off with words, but the whole thing's plain enough,
You are waiting for some message to bring you to war or love
In that old secret country beyond the wool-white waves,
Or it may be down beneath them in foam-bewildered caves
Where nine forsaken sea queens fling shuttles to and fro;
But beyond them, or beneath them, whether you will or no,
I am going too.

LAEGAIRE
Better tell it all out to the end;
He was born to luck in the cradle, his good luck may amend
The bad luck we were born to.

CONALL
I'll lay the whole thing bare.
You saw the luck that he had when he pushed in past me there.
Does anything stir on the sea?

LAEGAIRE
Not even a fish or a gull.

CONALL
You were gone but a little while. We were there and the ale-cup full.
We were half drunk and merry, and midnight on the stroke
When a wide, high man came in with a red foxy cloak,
With half-shut foxy eyes and a great laughing mouth,
And he said when we bid him drink, that he had so great a drouth
He could drink the sea.

CUCHULAIN
I thought he had come from one of you
Out of some Connaught rath, and would lap up milk and mew;
But if he so loved water I have the tale awry.

CONALL
You would not be so merry if he were standing by,
For when we had sung or danced as he were our next of kin
He promised to show us a game, the best that ever had been;
And when we had asked what game, he answered, “Why, whip off my head!
Then one of you two stoop down, and I’ll whip off his,” he said.
“A head for a head,” he said, “that is the game that I play.”

CUCHULAIN
How could he whip off a head when his own had been whipped away?

CONALL
We told him it over and over, and that ale had fuddled his wit,

But he stood and laughed at us there, as though his sides would split,
Till I could stand it no longer, and whipped off his head at a blow,
Being mad that he did not answer, and more at his laughing so,
And there on the ground where it fell it went on laughing at me.

LAEGAIRE
Till he took it up in his hands--

CONALL
And splashed himself into the sea.

CUCHULAIN
I have imagined as good when I've been as deep in the cup.

LAEGAIRE
You never did.

CUCHULAIN
And believed it.

CONALL
Cuchulain, when will you stop
Boasting of your great deeds, and weighing yourself with us two,
And crying out to the world whatever we say or do,
That you've said or done a better?--Nor is it a drunkard's tale,
Though we said to ourselves at first that it all came out of the ale,
And thinking that if we told it we should be a laughing-stock,
Swore we should keep it secret.

LAEGAIRE
But twelve months upon the clock.

CONALL
A twelvemonth from the first time.

LAEGAIRE
And the jug full up to the brim:
For we had been put from our drinking by the very thought of him.

CONALL
We stood as we're standing now.

LAEGAIRE
The horns were as empty.

CONALL
When
He ran up out of the sea with his head on his shoulders again.

CUCHULAIN
Why, this is a tale worth telling.

CONALL
And he called for his debt and his right,
And said that the land was disgraced because of us two from that night
If we did not pay him his debt.

LAEGAIRE
What is there to be said
When a man with a right to get it has come to ask for your head?

CONALL
If you had been sitting there you had been silent like us.

LAEGAIRE
He said that in twelve months more he would come again to this house
And ask his debt again. Twelve months are up to-day.

CONALL
He would have followed after if we had run away.

LAEGAIRE
Will he tell every mother's son that we have broken our word?

CUCHULAIN
Whether he does or does not we'll drive him out with the sword,
And take his life in the bargain if he but dare to scoff.

CONALL
How can you fight with a head that laughs when you've whipped it off?

LAEGAIRE
Or a man that can pick it up and carry it out in his hand?

CONALL
He is coming now, there's a splash and a rumble along the strand
As when he came last.

CUCHULAIN
Come, and put all your backs to the door.

[A tall, red-headed, red-cloaked man stands upon the threshold against the misty green of the sea; the ground, higher without than within the house, makes him seem taller even than he is. He leans upon a great two-handed sword]

LAEGAIRE
It is too late to shut it, for there he stands once more
And laughs like the sea.

CUCHULAIN
Old herring--You whip off heads! Why, then
Whip off your own, for it seems you can clap it on again.
Or else go down in the sea, go down in the sea, I say,
Find that old juggler Manannan and whip his head away;
Or the Red Man of the Boyne, for they are of your own sort,
Or if the waves have vexed you and you would find a sport
Of a more Irish fashion, go fight without a rest
A caterwauling phantom among the winds of the west.
But what are you waiting for? into the water, I say!
If there's no sword can harm you, I've an older trick to play,
An old five-fingered trick to tumble you out of the place;
I am Sualtim's son Cuchulain--what, do you laugh in my face?

RED MAN
So you too think me in earnest in wagering poll for poll!
A drinking joke and a gibe and a juggler's feat, that is all,
To make the time go quickly--for I am the drinker's friend,
The kindest of all Shape-Changers from here to the world's end,
The best of all tipsy companions. And now I bring you a gift:
I will lay it there on the ground for the best of you all to lift,

[*He lays his Helmet on the ground*]

And wear upon his own head, and choose for yourselves the best.
O! Laegaire and Conall are brave, but they were afraid of my jest.

Well, maybe I jest too grimly when the ale is in the cup.
There, I'm forgiven now--

[*Then in a more solemn voice as he goes out*]

Let the bravest take it up.

[*CONALL takes up Helmet and gazes at it with delight*]

LAEGAIRE
[*Singing, with a swaggering stride*]

Laegaire is best;
Between water and hill,
He fought in the west
With cat heads, until
At the break of day
All fell by his sword,
And he carried away
Their hidden hoard.

[*He seizes the Helmet*]

CONALL
Give it me, for what did you find in the bag
But the straw and the broken delf and the bits of dirty rag
You'd taken for good money?

CUCHULAIN
No, no, but give it me.

[*He takes Helmet*]

CONALL
The Helmet's mine or Laegaire's--you're the youngest of us three.

CUCHULAIN
[*Filling Helmet with ale*]

I did not take it to keep it--the Red Man gave it for one,
But I shall give it to all--to all of us three or to none;
That is as you look upon it--we will pass it to and fro,
And time and time about, drink out of it and so
Stroke into peace this cat that has come to take our lives.
Now it is purring again, and now I drink to your wives,
And I drink to Emer, my wife.

[*A great noise without and shouting*]

Why, what in God's name is that noise?

CONALL
What else but the charioteers and the kitchen and stable boys
Shouting against each other, and the worst of all is your own,
That chariot-driver, Laeg, and they'll keep it up till the dawn,
And there's not a man in the house that will close his eyes to-night,
Or be able to keep them from it, or know what set them to fight.

[*A noise of horns without*]

There, do you hear them now? such hatred has each for each
They have taken the hunting horns to drown one other's speech

For fear the truth may prevail.--Here's your good health and long life,
And, though she be quarrelsome, good health to Emer, your wife.

[The charioteers, Stable Boys and Kitchen Boys come running in.
They carry great horns, ladles and the like]

LAEG
I am Laeg, Cuchulain's driver, and my master's cock of the yard.

ANOTHER
Conall would scatter his feathers.

[*Confused murmurs*]

LAEGAIRE
[*To* CUCHULAIN]

No use, they won't hear a word.

CONALL
They'll keep it up till the dawn.

ANOTHER
It is Laegaire that is the best,
For he fought with cats in Connaught while Conall took his rest
And drained his ale pot.

ANOTHER
Laegaire--what does a man of his sort
Care for the like of us! He did it for his own sport.

ANOTHER
It was all mere luck at the best.

ANOTHER
But Conall, I say--

ANOTHER
Let me speak.

LAEG
You'd be dumb if the cock of the yard would but open his beak.

ANOTHER
Before your cock was born, my master was in the fight.

LAEG
Go home and praise your grand-dad. They took to the horns for spite,
For I said that no cock of your sort had been born since the fight began.

ANOTHER
Conall has got it, the best man has got it, and I am his man.

CUCHULAIN
Who was it started this quarrel?

A STABLE BOY
It was Laeg.

ANOTHER
It was Laeg done it all.

LAEG
A high, wide, foxy man came where we sat in the hall,
Getting our supper ready, with a great voice like the wind,
And cried that there was a helmet, or something of the kind,
That was for the foremost man upon the ridge of the earth.
So I cried your name through the hall,

[The others cry out and blow horns, partly drowning the rest of his speech]

but they denied its worth,
Preferring Laegaire or Conall, and they cried to drown my voice;
But I have so strong a throat that I drowned all their noise
Till they took to the hunting horns and blew them into my face,
And as neither side would give in--we would settle it in this place.
Let the Helmet be taken from Conall.

A STABLE BOY
No, Conall is the best man here.

ANOTHER
Give it to Laegaire that made the murderous cats pay dear.

CUCHULAIN
It has been given to none: that our rivalry might cease,
We have turned that murderous cat into a cup of peace.
I drank the first; and then Conall; give it to Laegaire now,

[*CONALL gives Helmet to LAEGAIRE*]

That it may purr in his hand and all of our servants know
That since the ale went in, its claws went out of sight.

A SERVANT
That's well--I will stop my shouting.

ANOTHER
Cuchulain is in the right;
I am tired of this big horn that has made me hoarse as a rook.

LAEG
Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER
By drinking the first he took
The whole of the honours himself.

LAEG
Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER
If Laegaire drink from it now he claims to be last and worst.

ANOTHER
Cuchulain and Conall have drunk.

ANOTHER
He is lost if he taste a drop.

LAEGAIRE
[*Laying Helmet on table*]

Did you claim to be better than us by drinking first from the cup?

CUCHULAIN
[His words are partly drowned by the murmurs of the crowd though he speaks very loud]

That juggler from the sea, that old red herring it is
Who has set us all by the ears--he brought the Helmet for this,
And because we would not quarrel he ran elsewhere to shout
That Conall and Laegaire wronged me, till all had fallen out.

[*The murmur grows less so that his words are heard*]

Who knows where he is now or who he is spurring to fight?
So get you gone, and whatever may cry aloud in the night,
Or show itself in the air, be silent until morn.

A SERVANT
Cuchulain is in the right--I am tired of this big horn.

CUCHULAIN
Go!

[The Servants turn toward the door but stop on hearing the voices of Women outside]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
[*Without*]

Mine is the better to look at.

CONALL'S WIFE
[*Without*]

But mine is better born.

EMER
[*Without*]

My man is the pithier man.

CUCHULAIN
Old hurricane, well done!
You've set our wives to the game that they may egg us on;
We are to kill each other that you may sport with us.
Ah, now, they've begun to wrestle as to who'll be first at the house.

[*The Women come to the door struggling*]

EMER
No, I have the right of place for I married the better man.

CONALL'S WIFE
[*Pulling Emer back*]

My nails in your neck and shoulder.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
And go before me if you can.
My husband fought in the West.

CONALL'S WIFE
[Kneeling in the door so as to keep the others out who pull at

her]

But what did he fight with there
But sidelong and spitting and helpless shadows of the dim air?
And what did he carry away but straw and broken delf?

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
Your own man made up that tale trembling alone by himself,
Drowning his terror.

EMER
[*Forcing herself in front*]

I am Emer, it is I go first through the door.
No one shall walk before me, or praise any man before
My man has been praised.

CUCHULAIN
[*Spreading his arms across the door so as to close it*]

Come, put an end to their quarrelling:
One is as fair as the other, and each one the wife of a king.
Break down the painted boards between the sill and the floor
That they come in together, each one at her own door.

[LAEGAIRE and CONALL begin to break out the bottoms of the windows, then their wives go to the windows, each to the window where her husband is. EMER stands at the door and sings while the boards are being broken out]

EMER
Nothing that he has done,
His mind that is fire,
His body that is sun,
Have set my head higher
Than all the world's wives.
Himself on the wind
Is the gift that he gives,
Therefore womenkind,
When their eyes have met mine,
Grow cold and grow hot,
Troubled as with wine
By a secret thought,
Preyed upon, fed upon
By jealousy and desire.
I am moon to that sun,
I am steel to that fire,

[The windows are now broken down to floor. CUCHULAIN takes his spear from the door, and the three Women come in at the same moment]

EMER
Cuchulain, put off this sloth and awake:
I will sing till I've stiffened your lip against every knave that would take
A share of your honour.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
You lie, for your man would take from my man.

CONALL'S WIFE
[To LAEGAIRE'S WIFE]

You say that, you double-face, and your own husband began.

CUCHULAIN
[*Taking up Helmet from table*]

Town land may rail at town land till all have gone to wrack,
The very straws may wrangle till they've thrown down the stack;
The very door-posts bicker till they've pulled in the door,
The very ale-jars jostle till the ale is on the floor,
But this shall help no further.

[*He throws Helmet into the sea*]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
It was not for your head,
And so you would let none wear it, but fling it away instead.

CONALL'S WIFE
But you shall answer for it, for you've robbed my man by this.

CONALL
You have robbed us both, Cuchulain.

LAEGAIRE
The greatest wrong there is

On the wide ridge of the world has been done to us two this day.

EMER
[*Drawing her dagger*]

Who is for Cuchulain?

CUCHULAIN
Silence!

EMER
Who is for Cuchulain, I say?

[She sings the same words as before, flourishing her dagger about. While she is singing, CONALL'S WIFE and LAEGAIRE'S WIFE draw their daggers and run at her, but CUCHULAIN forces them back. LAEGAIRE and CONALL draw their swords to strike CUCHULAIN]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
[Crying out so as to be heard through EMER'S singing]

Deafen her singing with horns!

CONALL'S WIFE
Cry aloud! blow horns! make a noise!

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE
Blow horns, clap hands, or shout, so that you smother her voice!

[The Horse Boys and Scullions blow their horns or fight among themselves. There is a deafening noise and a confused fight. Suddenly three black hands come through the windows and put out the torches. It is now pitch dark, but for a faint light outside the house which merely shows that there are moving forms, but not who or what they are, and in the darkness one can hear low terrified voices]

A VOICE
Coal-black, and headed like cats, they came up over the strand.

ANOTHER VOICE
And I saw one stretch to a torch and cover it with his hand.

ANOTHER VOICE
Another sooty fellow has plucked the moon from the air.

[A light gradually comes into the house from the sea, on which the moon begins to show once more. There is no light within the house, and the great beams of the walls are dark and full of shadows, and the persons of the play dark too against the light. The RED MAN is seen standing in the midst of the house. The black cat-headed Men crouch and stand about the door. One carries the Helmet, one the great sword]

RED MAN
I demand the debt that's owing. Let some man kneel down there
That I may cut his head off, or all shall go to wrack.

CUCHULAIN
He played and paid with his head and it's right that we pay him back,
And give him more than he gave, for he comes in here as a guest:
So I will give him my head.

[*EMER begins to keen*]

Little wife, little wife, be at rest.
Alive I have been far off in all lands under sun,
And been no faithful man; but when my story is done
My fame shall spring up and laugh, and set you high above all.

EMER
[*Putting her arms about him*]

It is you, not your fame, that I love.

CUCHULAIN
[*Tries to put her from him*]

You are young, you are wise, you can call
Some kinder and comelier man that will sit at home in the house.

EMER
Live and be faithless still.

CUCHULAIN
[*Throwing her from him*]

Would you stay the great barnacle-goose
When its eyes are turned to the sea and its beak to the salt of the air?

EMER
[*Lifting her dagger to stab herself*]

I, too, on the grey wing's path.

CUCHULAIN
[*Seizing dagger*]

Do you dare, do you dare, do you dare?
Bear children and sweep the house.

[*Forcing his way through the Servants who gather round*]

Wail, but keep from the road.

[He kneels before RED MAN. There is a pause]

Quick to your work, old Radish, you will fade when the cocks have crowed.

[A black cat-headed Man holds out the Helmet. The RED MAN takes it]

RED MAN
I have not come for your hurt, I'm the Rector of this land,
And with my spitting cat-heads, my frenzied moon-bred band,
Age after age I sift it, and choose for its championship
The man who hits my fancy.

[He places the Helmet on CUCHULAIN'S head]

And I choose the laughing lip
That shall not turn from laughing whatever rise or fall,
The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed by all;

The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a gambler’s throw;
And these things I make prosper, till a day come that I know,
When heart and mind shall darken that the weak may end the strong,
And the long remembering harpers have matter for their song.

The Shadowy Waters

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

FORGAEL.
AIBRIC.
SAILORS.
DECTORA.

THE SHADOWY WATERS

A mast and a great sail, a large tiller, a poop rising several feet above the stage, and from the overhanging stern a lanthorn hanging. The sea or sky is represented by a semi- circular cloth of which nothing can be seen except a dark abyss. The persons move but little. Some sailors are discovered crouching by the sail. FORGAEL *is asleep and* AIBRIC *standing by the tiller on the raised poop.*

FIRST SAILOR. It is long enough, and too long, Forgael has been bringing us through the waste places of the great sea.

SECOND SAILOR. We did not meet with a ship to make a prey of these eight weeks, or any shore or island to plunder or to harry.
It is a hard thing, age to be coming on me, and I not to get the chance of doing a robbery that would enable me to live quiet and honest to the end of my lifetime.

FIRST SAILOR. We are out since the new moon. What is worse again, it is the way we are in a ship, the barrels empty and my throat shrivelled with drought, and nothing to quench it but water only.

FORGAEL *[in his sleep]*. Yes; there, there; that hair that is the colour of burning.

FIRST SAILOR. Listen to him now, calling out in his sleep.

FORGAEL *[in his sleep]*. That pale forehead, that hair the colour of burning.

FIRST SAILOR. Some crazy dream he is in, and believe me it is no crazier than the thought he has waking. He is not the first that has had the wits drawn out from him through shadows and fantasies.

SECOND SAILOR. That is what ails him. I have been thinking it this good while.

FIRST SAILOR. Do you remember that galley we sank at the time of the full moon?

SECOND SAILOR. I do. We were becalmed the same night, and he sat up there playing that old harp of his until the moon had set.

FIRST SAILOR. I was sleeping up there by the bulwark, and when I woke in the sound of the harp a change came over my eyes, and I could see very strange things. The dead were floating upon the sea yet, and it seemed as if the life that went out of every one of them had turned to the shape of a manheaded bird — grey they were, and they rose up of a sudden and called out with voices like our own, and flew away singing to the west. Words like this they were singing:
‘Happiness beyond measure, happiness where the sun dies.’

SECOND SAILOR. I understand well what they are doing. My mother used to be talking of birds of the sort. They are sent by the lasting watchers to lead men away from this world and its women to some place of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived before the making of the earth. But I have no mind to go following him to that place.

FIRST SAILOR. Let us creep up to him and kill him in his sleep.

SECOND SAILOR. I would have made an end of him long ago, but that I was in dread of his harp. It is said that when he plays upon it he has power over all the listeners, with or without the body, seen or unseen, and any man that listens grows to be as mad as himself.

FIRST SAILOR. What way can he play it, being in his sleep?

SECOND SAILOR. But who would be our captain then to make out a course from the Bear and the Polestar, and to bring us back home?

FIRST SAILOR. I have that thought out. We must have Aibric with us. He knows the constellations as well as Forgael. He is a good hand with the sword. Join with us; be our captain, Aibric. We are agreed to put an end to Forgael, before he wakes.
There is no man but will be glad of it when it is done. Join with us, and you will have the captain's share and profit.

AIBRIC. Silence! for you have taken Forgael's pay.

FIRST SAILOR. Little pay we have had this twelvemonth. We would never have turned against him if he had brought us, as he promised, into seas that would be thick with ships. That was the bargain. What is the use of knocking about and fighting as we do unless we get the chance to drink more wine and kiss more women than lasting peaceable men through their long lifetime? You will be as good a leader as ever he was himself, if you will but join us.

AIBRIC. And do you think that I will join myself
To men like you, and murder him who has been
My master from my earliest childhood up?

No! nor to a world of men like you
When Forgael's in the other scale. Come! come!
I'll answer to more purpose when you have drawn
That sword out of its scabbard.

FIRST SAILOR. You have awaked him. We had best go, for we have missed this chance. — [SAILORS *go out.*

FORGAEL. Have the birds passed us? I could hear your voice. But there were others.

AIBRIC. — I have seen nothing pass.

FORGAEL. You are certain of it? I never wake from sleep
But that I am afraid they may have passed;
For they're my only pilots. I have not seen them
For many days, and yet there must be many
Dying at every moment in the world.

AIBRIC. They have all but driven you crazy, and already
The sailors have been plotting for your death;
Whatever has been cried into your ears
Has lured you on to death.

FORGAEL. — No; but they promised —

AIBRIC. I know their promises. You have told me all.
They are to bring you to unheard-of passion,
To some strange love the world knows nothing of,
Some Ever-living woman as you think,
One that can cast no shadow, being unearthly.

But that's all folly. Turn the ship about,
Sail home again, be some fair woman's friend;
Be satisfied to live like other men,
And drive impossible dreams away. The world
Has beautiful women to please every man.

FORGAEL. But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.

AIBRIC. — All that ever loved
Have loved that way — there is no other way.

FORGAEL. Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.

AIBRIC. When they have twenty years; in middle life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

FORGAEL. — It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow — no — no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.

AIBRIC. — I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.
It may be that the dead have lit upon it,
Or those that never lived; no mortal can.

FORGAEL. I only of all living men shall find it.

AIBRIC. Then seek it in the habitable world.
Or leap into that sea and end a journey
That has no other end.

FORGAEL. — I cannot answer.
I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.
Yet, sometimes there's a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
I have but images, analogies,
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.
For what's the rose but that? miraculous cries,
Old stories about mystic marriages,
Impossible truths? But when the torch is lit
All that is impossible is certain,
I plunge in the abyss. [SAILORS *come in.*

FIRST SAILOR. Look there! there in the mist! A ship of spices.

SECOND SAILOR. We would not have noticed her but for the sweet smell through the air.
Ambergris and sandalwood, and all the herbs the witches bring from the sunrise.

FIRST SAILOR. No; but opoponax and cinnamon.

FORGAEL [*taking the tiller from* AIBRIC]. The
Ever-living have kept my bargain; they have paid you on the nail.

AIBRIC. Take up that rope to make her fast while we are plundering her.

FIRST SAILOR. There is a king on her deck and a queen. Where there is one woman it is certain there will be others.

AIBRIC. Speak lower or they'll hear.

FIRST SAILOR. They cannot hear; they are too much taken up with one another. Look!
he has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

SECOND SAILOR. When she finds out we have as good men aboard she may not be too sorry in the end.

FIRST SAILOR. She will be as dangerous as a wild cat. These queens think more of the riches and the great name they get by marriage than of a ready hand and a strong body.

SECOND SAILOR. There is nobody is natural but a robber. That is the reason the whole world goes tottering about upon its bandy legs.

AIBRIC. Run upon them now, and overpower the crew while yet asleep.
[SAILORS *and* AIBRIC *go out. The clashing of swords and confused voices are heard from the other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.*

FORGAEL *[who has remained at the tiller]*
There! there! They come! Gull, gannet, or diver,
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's.
They hover over the masthead awhile
To wait their friends, but when their friends have come
They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs,
One — and one — a couple — five together.
And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side, and higher in the air,
They've gone up thither, friend's run up by friend;
They've gone to their beloved ones in the air,
In the waste of the high air, that they may wander
Among the windy meadows of the dawn.
But why are they still waiting? Why are they
Circling and circling over the masthead?
Ah! now they all look down — they'll speak of me
What the Ever-living put into their minds,
And of that shadowless unearthly woman
At the world's end. I hear the message now.
But it's all mystery. There's one that cries,
'From love and hate.' Before the sentence ends
Another breaks upon it with a cry,
'From love and death and out of sleep and waking.'
And with the cry another cry is mixed,

‘What can we do, being shadows? ‘All mystery,
And I am drunken with a dizzy light.
But why do they still hover overhead?
Why are you circling there? Why do you linger?
Why do you not run to your desire,
Now that you have happy winged bodies?
Being too busy in the air, and the high air,
They cannot hear my voice. But why that circling?

[The SAILORS *have returned*. DECTORA *is with them.*
[Turning and seeing her.] Why are you standing with your eyes upon me?
You are not the world’s core. Oh no, no, no!
That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,
But have not bitten yet.

DECTORA. — I am a queen,
And ask for satisfaction upon these
Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.

FORGAEL. I’d set my hopes on one that had no shadow: —
Where do you come from? who brought you to this place?
Why do you cast a shadow? Answer me that.

DECTORA. Would that the storm that overthrew my ships,
And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,
And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,
Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,
I ask a fitting punishment for all
That raised their hands against him.

FORGAEL. — There are some
That weigh and measure all in these waste seas —
They that have all the wisdom that's in life,
And all that prophesying images
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;
They have it that the plans of kings and queens
Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing matters
But laughter and tears — laughter, laughter and tears —
That every man should carry his own soul
Upon his shoulders.

DECTORA. You've nothing but wild words,
And I would know if you would give me vengeance.

FORGAEL. When she finds out that I'll not let her go —
When she knows that.

DECTORA. What is that you are muttering?
That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.

FORGAEL. Although you are more beautiful than any,
I almost long that it were possible;
But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them out,
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck —
As now.

DECTORA. Does wandering in these desolate seas
And listening to the cry of wind and wave
Bring madness?

FORGAEL. — Queen, I am not mad.

DECTORA. And yet you say the water and the wind
Would rise against me.

FORGAEL. — NO, I am not mad —
If it be not that hearing messages
From lasting watchers that outlive the moon
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

DECTORA. And did those watchers bid you take me captive?

FORGAEL. Both you and I are taken in the net.
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised
I shall have love in their immortal fashion.
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,
That none might take you from me.

DECTORA *[first trembling back from the mast where the harp is, and then laughing].*
For a moment
Your raving of a message and a harp
More mighty than the stars half troubled me.

But all that's raving. Who is there can compel
The daughter and granddaughter of a king
To be his bedfellow?

FORGAEL. — Until your lips
Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.

DECTORA. My husband and my king died at my feet,
And yet you talk of love.

FORGAEL. — The movement of time
Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.

DECTORA. — I understand you now.
You have a Druid craft of wicked sound,
Wrung from the cold women of the sea —
A magic that can call a demon up,
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

FORGAEL. Your soul shall give the kiss.

DECTORA. — I am not afraid,
While there's a rope to run into a noose
Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that it is fearless.

FORGAEL. — Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh

Of the great golden net that is about us.

DECTORA. There's nothing in the world that's worth a fear.
[She passes FORGAEL *and stands for a moment looking into his face.*
I have good reason for that thought.
[She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the poop.
And now
I can put fear away as a queen should.
[She mounts on the bulwark, and turns towards FORGAEL.
Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face
You did not see my purpose. I shall have gone
Before a hand can touch me.

FORGAEL *[folding his arms'].* My hands are still;
The Ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.

FIRST SAILOR. There is no need for you to drown. Give us our pardon and we will bring you home on your own ship, and make an end of this man that is leading us to death.

DECTORA. I promise it.

AIBRIC. — I am on his side.
I'd strike a blow for him to give him time
To cast his dreams away.

FIRST SAILOR. He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

DECTORA. Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn
To him that strikes him first!

FIRST SAILOR. I will strike him first. No!
for that music of his might put a beast's head
upon my shoulders, or it may be two heads and they devouring one another.

DECTORA. I'll give a golden galley full of fruit
That has the heady flavour of new wine
To him that wounds him to the death.

FIRST SAILOR. I'll strike at him. His spells, when he dies, will die with him and vanish away.

SECOND SAILOR. I'll strike at him.

THE OTHERS. And I! And I! And I!
[FORGAEL *plays upon the harp.*

FIRST SAILOR [*falling into a dream].* It is what they are saying, there is some person dead in the other ship; we have to go and wake him. They did not say what way he came to his end, but it was sudden.

SECOND SAILOR. YOU are right, you are right. We have to go to that wake.

DECTORA. He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,
And set you dreaming.

SECOND SAILOR. What way can we raise a keen, not knowing what name to call him by?

FIRST SAILOR. Come on to his ship. His name will come to mind in a moment. All

I know is he died a thousand years ago, and was never yet waked.

SECOND SAILOR. HOW can we wake him having no ale?

FIRST SAILOR. I saw a skin of ale aboard her — a pig-skin of brown ale.

THIRD SAILOR. Come to the ale, a pigskin of brown ale, a goatskin of yellow!

FIRST SAILOR *[singing].* Brown ale and yellow; yellow and brown ale; a goatskin of yellow!

ALL *[singing].* Brown ale and yellow; yellow and brown ale!
[SAILORS *go out,*

DECTORA. Protect me now, gods, that my people swear by!
[AIBRIC *has risen from the ground where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.*

AIBRIC. Where is my sword that fell out of my hand
When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!
[He goes dreamily towards the sword, but DECTORA *runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.*
[Sleepily.] Queen, give it me.

DECTORA. — No, I have need of it.

AIBRIC. Why do you need a sword? But you may keep it,
Now that he's dead I have no need of it,
For everything is gone.

A SAILOR *[calling from the other ship].*
Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me who it is that we are waking.

AIBRIC *[half to* DECTORA, *half to himself].*
What name had that dead king? Arthur of Britain?
No, no — not Arthur. I remember now.
It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died
Brokenhearted, having lost his queen
Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,
For he was killed. 0!0!0!0!0!0!
For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.
[He goes out. While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows, one hears the singing of the sailors *from the other ship,* DECTORA *stands with the sword lifted in front of* FORGAEL. *He changes the tune.*

DECTORA. I will end all your magic on the instant.
[Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall She spreads out her hair.
She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.
The sword is to lie beside him in the grave.
It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,
For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,
And that he died a thousand years ago.
O! O! O!
[FORGAEL *changes the tune.]*
But no, that is not it.

I knew him well, and while I heard him laughing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.
But what is it that made me say I loved him?
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,
And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

FORGAEL. Do you not know me, lady? I am he
That you are weeping for.

DECTORA. — No, for he is dead.
O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

FORGAEL. It was so given out, but I will prove
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon
And you will recollect my face and voice.
For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.
[He starts up, listening to the birds.
The harp slips from his hands, and remains leaning against the bulwarks behind him.
What are the birds at there?
Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?
What are you calling out above the mast?
If railing and reproach and mockery
Because I have awakened her to love

By magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:
Being driven on by voices and by dreams
That were clear messages from the Everliving,
I have done right. What could I but obey?
And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

DECTORA [*laughing*]. Why, it's a wonder out of reckoning
That I should keen him from the full of the moon
To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

FORGAEL. How have I wronged her now that she is merry?
But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the Ever-living,
And all the tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring's but a marriage song;
But if it be reproach, I answer this:
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman in her own despite,
For love is war, and there is hatred in it;
And if you say that she came willingly —

DECTORA. Why do you turn away and hide your face,
That I would look upon for ever?

FORGAEL. — My grief.

DECTORA. Have I not loved you for a thousand years?

FORGAEL. I never have been golden-armed Iollan.

DECTORA. I do not understand. I know your face
Better than my own hands.

FORGAEL. — I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.

DECTORA. — Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Aengus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there?

FORGAEL. — I have deceived you;
I have deceived you utterly.

DECTORA. — How can that be?
Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half?

FORGAEL. — Oh, no!

DECTORA. — And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter?
I'll never give another thought to it;
No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubbornhearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and flattery;

And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.

FORGAEL. — That's not the story;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,
There is no measure that it would not burst.
I will confess it all.

DECTORA. — What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,
And you have grown to be a burning coal
In the imagination and intellect?
If something that's most fabulous were true —
If you had taken me by magic spells,
And killed a lover or husband at my feet —
I would not let you speak, for I would know
That it was yesterday and not to-day
I loved him; I would cover up my ears,
As I am doing now. *[A pause.]* Why do you weep?

FORGAEL. I weep because I've nothing for your eyes
But desolate waters and a battered ship.

DECTORA. Oh, why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

FORGAEL. I weep — I weep because bare night's above,
And not a roof of ivory and gold.

DECTORA. I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.

I would that there was nothing in the world
But my beloved — that night and day had perished,
And all that is and all that is to be,
And all that is not the meeting of our lips.

FORGAEL. Why do you turn your eyes upon bare night?
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon
My enemy?

DECTORA. I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know
How great a wrong it is to let one's thought
Wander a moment when one is in love?
[He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.

DECTORA. Why are you looking at the sea?

FORGAEL. — Look there!
There where the cloud creeps up upon the moon.

DECTORA. What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds
That fly into the west?
[The scene darkens, but there is a ray of light upon the figures.

FORGAEL. — But listen, listen!

DECTORA. What is there but the crying of the birds?

FORGAEL. If you'll but listen closely to that crying
You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.

DECTORA. Clouds have hid the moon.
The birds cry out, what can I do but tremble?

FORGAEL. They have been circling over our heads in the air,
But now that they have taken to the road
We have to follow, for they are our pilots;
They're crying out. Can you not hear their cry? —
'There is a country at the end of the world
Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'
[The sailors *come in with* AIBRIC.
They carry torches.

AIBRIC. We have lit upon a treasure that's so great
Imagination cannot reckon it.
The hold is full — boxes of precious spice,
Ivory images with amethyst eyes,
Dragons with eyes of ruby. The whole ship
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.
Let us return to our own country, Forgael,
And spend it there. Have you not found this queen?
What more have you to look for on the seas?

FORGAEL. I cannot — I am going on to the end.
As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

AIBRIC. Speak to him, lady, and bid him turn the ship.
He knows that he is taking you to death;
He cannot contradict me.

DECTORA. — Is that true?

FORGAEL. I do not know for certain.

DECTORA. — Carry me
To some sure country, some familiar place.
Have we not everything that life can give
In having one another?

FORGAEL. — How could I rest
If I refused the messengers and pilots
With all those sights and all that crying out?

DECTORA. I am a woman, I die at every breath.

AIBRIC *[to the* sailors]. To the other ship, for there's no help in words.
And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again.
[sailors *go out, leaving one torch perhaps in a torch-holder on the bulwark.*

FORGAEL *[to* DECTORA]. Go with him,
For he will shelter you and bring you home.
AIBRIC [*taking* FORGAEL'S *hand],* I'll do it for his sake.

DECTORA. — No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

AIBRIC. Farewell! Farewell!
[He goes out. The light grows stronger.

DECTORA. The sword is in the rope —
The rope's in two — it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two — this crown —
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.
[The harp begins to burn as with fire.

FORGAEL *[gathering* DECTORA's *hair about hint].*
Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

DEIRDRE
TO MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL
Who in the generosity of her genius has played my
Deirdre in Dub/in and London with the Abbey
Company, as well as with her own people, and
TO ROBERT GREGORY
who designed the beautiful scene she played it in.

The Hour-Glass (Verse Version)

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

WISE MAN.
BRIDGET, his wife.
TEIGUE, a fool.
ANGEL.
Children and Pupils.

THE HOUR-GLASS (Verse Version)

Pupils come in and stand before the stage curtain, which is still closed. One pupil carries a book.

FIRST PUPIL
He said we might choose the subject for the lesson.

SECOND PUPIL
There is none of us wise enough to do that.

THIRD PUPIL
It would need a great deal of wisdom to know what it is we want to know.

FOURTH PUPIL
I will question him.

FIFTH PUPIL
You?

FOURTH PUPIL
Last night I dreamt that some one came and told me to question him.
I was to say to him, 'You were wrong to say there is no God and no
soul--maybe, if there is not much of either, there is yet some tatters,
some tag on the wind--so to speak--some rag upon a bush, some bob-tail
of a god.' I will argue with him,--nonsense though it be--according to
my dream, and you will see how well I can argue, and what thoughts I have.

FIRST PUPIL
I'd as soon listen to dried peas in a bladder, as listen to your thoughts.

[*Fool comes in.*

FOOL
Give me a penny.

SECOND PUPIL
Let us choose a subject by chance. Here is his big book. Let us turn over the pages slowly. Let one of us put down his finger without looking. The passage his finger lights on will be the subject for the lesson.

FOOL
Give me a penny.

THIRD PUPIL
(*Taking up book*) How heavy it is.

FOURTH PUPIL
Spread it on Teigue's back, and then we can all stand round and see the choice.

SECOND PUPIL
Make him spread out his arms.

FOURTH PUPIL
Down on your knees. Hunch up your back. Spread your arms out now, and look like a golden eagle in a church. Keep still, keep still.

FOOL
Give me a penny.

THIRD PUPIL
Is that the right cry for an eagle cock?

SECOND PUPIL
I'll turn the pages--you close your eyes and put your finger down.

THIRD PUPIL
That's it, and then he cannot blame us for the choice.

FIRST PUPIL
There, I have chosen. Fool, keep still--and if what's wise is strange and sounds like nonsense, we've made a good choice.

FIFTH PUPIL
The Master has come.

FOOL
Will anybody give a penny to a fool?

[One of the pupils draws back the stage curtain showing the Master sitting at his desk. There is an hour-glass upon his desk or in a bracket on the wall. One pupil puts the book before him.

FIRST PUPIL
We have chosen the passage for the lesson, Master. 'There are two living countries, one visible and one invisible, and when it is summer there, it is winter here, and when it is November with us, it is lambing-time there.'

WISE MAN
That passage, that passage! what mischief has there been since yesterday?

FIRST PUPIL
None, Master.

WISE MAN
Oh yes, there has; some craziness has fallen from the wind, or risen from the graves of old men, and made you choose that subject.

FOURTH PUPIL
I knew that it was folly, but they would have it.

THIRD PUPIL
Had we not better say we picked it by chance?

SECOND PUPIL
No; he would say we were children still.

FIRST PUPIL
I have found a sentence under that one that says--as though to show it had a hidden meaning--a beggar wrote it upon the walls of Babylon.

WISE MAN
Then find some beggar and ask him what it means, for I will have nothing to do with it.

FOURTH PUPIL
Come, Teigue, what is the old book's meaning when it says that there are sheep that drop their lambs in November?

FOOL
To be sure--everybody knows, everybody in the world knows, when it is Spring with us, the trees are withering there, when it is Summer with us, the snow is falling there, and have I not myself heard the lambs that are there all bleating on a cold November day--to be sure, does not everybody with an intellect know that; and maybe when it's night with

us, it is day with them, for many a time I have seen the roads lighted before me.

WISE MAN
The beggar who wrote that on Babylon wall meant that there is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or known till the faculties whereby we master the kingdom of this world wither away, like green things in winter. A monkish thought, the most mischievous thought that ever passed out of a man's mouth.

FIRST PUPIL
If he meant all that, I will take an oath that he was spindle-shanked, and cross-eyed, and had a lousy itching shoulder, and that his heart was crosser than his eyes, and that he wrote it out of malice.

SECOND PUPIL
Let's come away and find a better subject.

FOURTH PUPIL
And maybe now you'll let me choose.

FIRST PUPIL
Come.

WISE MAN
Were it but true 'twould alter everything
Until the stream of the world had changed its course,
And that and all our thoughts had run
Into some cloudy thunderous spring
They dream to be its source--

Aye, to some frenzy of the mind;
And all that we have done would be undone,
Our speculation but as the wind.

[*A pause.*

I have dreamed it twice.

FIRST PUPIL
Something has troubled him.

[*Pupils go out.*

WISE MAN
Twice have I dreamed it in a morning dream,
Now nothing serves my pupils but to come
With a like thought. Reason is growing dim;
A moment more and Frenzy will beat his drum
And laugh aloud and scream;
And I must dance in the dream.
No, no, but it is like a hawk, a hawk of the air,
It has swooped down--and this swoop makes the third--
And what can I, but tremble like a bird?

FOOL
Give me a penny.

WISE MAN
That I should dream it twice, and after that, that they should pick it out.

FOOL
Won’t you give me a penny?

WISE MAN
What do you want? What can it matter to you whether the words I am reading are wisdom or sheer folly?

FOOL
Such a great, wise teacher will not refuse a penny to a fool.

WISE MAN
Seeing that everybody is a fool when he is asleep and dreaming, why do you call me wise?

FOOL
O, I know,--I know, I know what I have seen.

WISE MAN
Well, to see rightly is the whole of wisdom, whatever dream be with us.

FOOL
When I went by Kilcluan, where the bells used to be ringing at the break of every day, I could hear nothing but the people snoring in their houses. When I went by Tubbervanach, where the young men used to be climbing the
hill to the blessed well, they were sitting at the cross-roads playing cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they

said it was no misfortune, but that it was the wisdom they had learned from your teaching.

WISE MAN
And you too have called me wise--you would be paid for that good opinion doubtless--Run to the kitchen, my wife will give you food and drink.

FOOL
That's foolish advice for a wise man to give.

WISE MAN
Why, Fool?

FOOL
What is eaten is gone--I want pennies for my bag. I must buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time the sun is weak, and snares to catch the rabbits and the hares, and a big pot to cook them in.

WISE MAN
I have more to think about than giving pennies to your like, so run away.

FOOL
Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. The fishermen let me sleep among their nets in the loft because I bring them luck; and in the summer time, the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It is lucky even to look at me, but it is much more lucky to give me a penny. If I was not lucky I would starve.

WISE MAN
What are the shears for?

FOOL
I won’t tell you. If I told you, you would drive them away.

WISE MAN
Drive them away! Who would I drive away?

FOOL
I won’t tell you.

WISE MAN
Not if I give you a penny?

FOOL
No.

WISE MAN
Not if I give you two pennies?

FOOL
You will be very lucky if you give me two pennies, but I won’t tell you.

WISE MAN
Three pennies?

FOOL
Four, and I will tell you.

WISE MAN
Very well--four, but from this out I will not call you Teigue the Fool.

FOOL
Let me come close to you, where nobody will hear me; but first you must

promise not to drive them away. (*Wise Man nods.*) Every day men go out dressed in black and spread great black nets over the hills, great black nets.

WISE MAN
A strange place that to fish in.

FOOL
They spread them out on the hills that they may catch the feet of the angels; but every morning just before the dawn, I go out and cut the nets with the shears and the angels fly away.

WISE MAN
(*Speaking with excitement*) Ah, now I know that you are Teigue the Fool. You say that I am wise, and yet I say, there are no angels.

FOOL
I have seen plenty of angels.

WISE MAN
No, no, you have not.

FOOL
They are plenty if you but look about you. They are like the blades of grass.

WISE MAN
They are plenty as the blades of grass--I heard that phrase when I was but a child and was told folly.

FOOL
When one gets quiet. When one is so quiet that there is not a thought in one's head maybe, there is something that wakes up inside one, something happy and quiet, and then all in a minute one can smell summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, but they will not let us look at their faces. Oh no, it is not right that we should look at their faces.

WISE MAN
You have fallen asleep upon a hill, yet, even those that used to dream of angels dream now of other things.

FOOL
I saw one but a moment ago--that is because I am lucky. It was coming behind me, but it was not laughing.

WISE MAN
There's nothing but what men can see when they are awake. Nothing, nothing.

FOOL
I knew you would drive them away.

WISE MAN
Pardon me, Fool,
I had forgotten who I spoke to.
Well, there are your four pennies--Fool you are called,
And all day long they cry, 'Come hither, Fool.'

[*The Fool goes close to him.*

Or else it's, 'Fool, be gone.'

[*The Fool goes further off.*

Or, ‘Fool, stand there.’

[*The Fool straightens himself up.*

Or, ‘Fool, go sit in the corner.’

[*The Fool sits in the corner.*

And all the while
What were they all but fools before I came?
What are they now, but mirrors that seem men,
Because of my image? Fool, hold up your head.

[*Fool does so.*

What foolish stories they have told of the ghosts
That fumbled with the clothes upon the bed,
Or creaked and shuffled in the corridor,
Or else, if they were pious bred,
Of angels from the skies,
That coming through the door,
Or, it may be, standing there,
Would solidly out stare
The steadiest eyes with their unnatural eyes,
Aye, on a man’s own floor.

[An angel has come in. It should be played by a man if a man can be found with the right voice, and may wear a little golden domino and a halo made of metal. Or the

whole face may be a beautiful mask, in which case the last sentence on page 136 should not be spoken.

Yet it is strange, the strangest thing I have known,
That I should still be haunted by the notion
That there's a crisis of the spirit wherein
We get new sight, and that they know some trick
To turn our thoughts for their own ends to frenzy.
Why do you put your finger to your lip,
And creep away?

[*Fool goes out.*

(*Wise Man sees Angel.*) What are you? Who are you?
I think I saw some like you in my dreams,
When but a child. That thing about your head,--
That brightness in your hair--that flowery branch;
But I have done with dreams, I have done with dreams.

ANGEL
I am the crafty one that you have called.

WISE MAN
How that I called?

ANGEL
I am the messenger.

WISE MAN
What message could you bring to one like me?

ANGEL (turning the hour-glass)

That you will die when the last grain of sand
Has fallen through this glass.

WISE MAN
I have a wife.
Children and pupils that I cannot leave:
Why must I die, my time is far away?

ANGEL
You have to die because no soul has passed
The heavenly threshold since you have opened school,
But grass grows there, and rust upon the hinge;
And they are lonely that must keep the watch.

WISE MAN
And whither shall I go when I am dead?

ANGEL
You have denied there is a purgatory,
Therefore that gate is closed; you have denied
There is a heaven, and so that gate is closed.

WISE MAN
Where then? For I have said there is no hell.

ANGEL
Hell is the place of those who have denied;
They find there what they planted and what dug,
A Lake of Spaces, and a Wood of Nothing,

And wander there and drift, and never cease
Wailing for substance.

WISE MAN
Pardon me, blessed Angel,
I have denied and taught the like to others.
But how could I believe before my sight
Had come to me?

ANGEL
It is too late for pardon.

WISE MAN
Had I but met your gaze as now I met it--
But how can you that live but where we go
In the uncertainty of dizzy dreams
Know why we doubt? Parting, sickness and death,
The rotting of the grass, tempest and drouth,
These are the messengers that came to me.
Why are you silent? You carry in your hands
God’s pardon, and you will not give it me.
Why are you silent? Were I not afraid,
I’d kiss your hands--no, no, the hem of your dress.

ANGEL
Only when all the world has testified,
May soul confound it, crying out in joy,
And laughing on its lonely precipice.
What’s dearth and death and sickness to the soul
That knows no virtue but itself? Nor could it,

So trembling with delight and mother-naked,
Live unabashed if the arguing world stood by.

WISE MAN
It is as hard for you to understand
Why we have doubted, as it is for us
To banish doubt--what folly have I said?
There can be nothing that you do not know:
Give me a year--a month--a week--a day,
I would undo what I have done--an hour--
Give me until the sand has run in the glass.

ANGEL
Though you may not undo what you have done,
I have this power--if you but find one soul,
Before the sands have fallen, that still believes,
One fish to lie and spawn among the stones
Till the great fisher's net is full again,
You may, the purgatorial fire being passed,
Spring to your peace.

[*Pupils sing in the distance.*

'Who stole your wits away
And where are they gone?'

WISE MAN
My pupils come,
Before you have begun to climb the sky
I shall have found that soul. They say they doubt,

But what their mothers dinned into their ears
Cannot have been so lightly rooted up;
Besides, I can disprove what I once proved--
And yet give me some thought, some argument,
More mighty than my own.

ANGEL
Farewell--farewell,
For I am weary of the weight of time.

[Angel goes out. Wise Man makes a step to follow and pauses.
Some of his pupils come in at the other side of the stage.

FIRST PUPIL
Master, master, you must choose the subject.

[Enter other pupils with Fool, about whom they dance; all
the pupils may have little cushions on which presently
they seat themselves.

SECOND PUPIL
Here is a subject--where have the Fool's wits gone? (*singing*)
'Who dragged your wits away
Where no one knows?
Or have they run off
On their own pair of shoes?'

FOOL
Give me a penny.

FIRST PUPIL
The Master will find your wits,

SECOND PUPIL
And when they are found, you must not beg for pennies.

THIRD PUPIL
They are hidden somewhere in the badger's hole,
But you must carry an old candle end
If you would find them.

FOURTH PUPIL
They are up above the clouds.

FOOL
Give me a penny, give me a penny.

FIRST PUPIL (*singing*)

'I'll find your wits again,
Come, for I saw them roll,
To where old badger mumbles
In the black hole.'

SECOND PUPIL (*singing*)

'No, but an angel stole them
The night that you were born,
And now they are but a rag,
On the moon's horn.'

WISE MAN
Be silent.

FIRST PUPIL
Can you not see that he is troubled?

[*All the pupils are seated.*

WISE MAN
What do you think of when alone at night?
Do not the things your mothers spoke about,
Before they took the candle from the bedside,
Rush up into the mind and master it,
Till you believe in them against your will?

SECOND PUPIL (*to first pupil*)

You answer for us.

THIRD PUPIL (*in a whisper to first pupil*)

Be careful what you say;
If he persuades you to an argument,
He will but turn us all to mockery.

FIRST PUPIL
We had no minds until you made them for us;
Our bodies only were our mothers' work.

WISE MAN
You answer with incredible things. It is certain

That there is one,--though it may be but one--
Believes in God and in some heaven and hell--
In all those things we put into our prayers.

FIRST PUPIL
We thought those things before our minds were born,
But that was long ago--we are not children.

WISE MAN
You are afraid to tell me what you think
Because I am hot and angry when I am crossed.
I do not blame you for it; but have no fear,
For if there's one that sat on smiling there,
As though my arguments were sweet as milk
Yet found them bitter, I will thank him for it,
If he but speak his mind.

FIRST PUPIL
There is no one, Master,
There is not one but found them sweet as milk.

WISE MAN
The things that have been told us in our childhood
Are not so fragile.

SECOND PUPIL
We are no longer children.

THIRD PUPIL
We all believe in you and in what you have taught.

OTHER PUPILS
All, all, all, all, in you, nothing but you.

WISE MAN
I have deceived you--where shall I go for words--
I have no thoughts--my mind has been swept bare.
The messengers that stand in the fiery cloud,
Fling themselves out, if we but dare to question,
And after that, the Babylonian moon
Blots all away.

FIRST PUPIL (*to other pupils*)

I take his words to mean
That visionaries, and martyrs when they are raised
Above translunary things, and there enlightened,
As the contention is, may lose the light,
And flounder in their speech when the eyes open.

SECOND PUPIL
How well he imitates their trick of speech.

THIRD PUPIL
Their air of mystery.

FOURTH PUPIL
Their empty gaze,
As though they'd looked upon some winged thing,
And would not condescend to mankind after.

FIRST PUPIL
Master, we have all learnt that truth is learnt
When the intellect's deliberate and cold,
As it were a polished mirror that reflects
An unchanged world; and not when the steel melts,
Bubbling and hissing, till there's naught but fume.

WISE MAN
When it is melted, when it all fumes up,
They walk, as when beside those three in the furnace
The form of the fourth.

FIRST PUPIL
Master, there's none among us
That has not heard your mockery of these,
Or thoughts like these, and we have not forgot.

WISE MAN
Something incredible has happened--some one has come
Suddenly like a grey hawk out of the air,
And all that I declared untrue is true.

FIRST PUPIL (*to other pupils*)

You'd think the way he says it, that he felt it.
There's not a mummer to compare with him.
He's something like a man.

SECOND PUPIL
Give us some proof.

WISE MAN
What proof have I to give, but that an angel
An instant ago was standing on that spot.

[*The pupils rise.*

THIRD PUPIL
You dreamed it.

WISE MAN
I was awake as I am now.

FIRST PUPIL (*to the others*)

I may be dreaming now for all I know.
He wants to show we have no certain proof
Of anything in the world.

SECOND PUPIL
There is this proof
That shows we are awake--we have all one world
While every dreamer has a world of his own,
And sees what no one else can.

THIRD PUPIL
Teigue sees angels.
So when the Master says he has seen an angel,
He may have seen one.

FIRST PUPIL
Both may still be dreamers;

Unless it’s proved the angels were alike.

SECOND PUPIL
What sort are the angels, Teigue?

THIRD PUPIL
That will prove nothing,
Unless we are sure prolonged obedience
Has made one angel like another angel
As they were eggs.

FIRST PUPIL
The Master’s silent now:
For he has found that to dispute with us--
Seeing that he has taught us what we know--
Is but to reason with himself. Let us away,
And find if there is one believer left.

WISE MAN
Yes, yes. Find me but one that still believes
The things that we were told when we were children.

THIRD PUPIL
He’ll mock and maul him.

FOURTH PUPIL
From the first I knew
He wanted somebody to argue with.

[*They go.*

WISE MAN
I have no reason left. All dark, all dark!

[*Pupils return laughing. They push forward fourth pupil.*

FIRST PUPIL
Here, Master, is the very man you want.
He said, when we were studying the book,
That maybe after all the monks were right,
And you mistaken, and if we but gave him time,
He'd prove that it was so.

FOURTH PUPIL
I never said it.

WISE MAN
Dear friend, dear friend, do you believe in God?

FOURTH PUPIL
Master, they have invented this to mock me.

WISE MAN
You are afraid of me.

FOURTH PUPIL
They know well, Master,
That all I said was but to make them argue.
They've pushed me in to make a mock of me,
Because they knew I could take either side
And beat them at it.

WISE MAN
If you believe in God,
You are my soul's one friend.

[*Pupils laugh.*

Mistress or wife
Can give us but our good or evil luck
Amid the howling world, but you shall give
Eternity, and those sweet-throated things
That drift above the moon.

[*The pupils look at one another and are silent.*

SECOND PUPIL
How strange he is.

WISE MAN
The angel that stood there upon that spot,
Said that my soul was lost unless I found out
One that believed.

FOURTH PUPIL
Cease mocking at me, Master,
For I am certain that there is no God
Nor immortality, and they that said it
Made a fantastic tale from a starved dream
To plague our hearts. Will that content you, Master?

WISE MAN
The giddy glass is emptier every moment,

And you stand there, debating, laughing and wrangling.
Out of my sight! Out of my sight, I say.

[*He drives them out.*

I'll call my wife, for what can women do,
That carry us in the darkness of their bodies,
But mock the reason that lets nothing grow
Unless it grow in light. Bridget, Bridget.
A woman never ceases to believe,
Say what we will. Bridget, come quickly, Bridget.

[Bridget comes in wearing her apron. Her sleeves turned up
from her arms, which are covered with flour.

Wife, what do you believe in? Tell me the truth,
And not--as is the habit with you all--
Something you think will please me. Do you pray?
Sometimes when you're alone in the house, do you pray?

BRIDGET
Prayers--no, you taught me to leave them off long ago. At first I was sorry, but I am glad now, for I am sleepy in the evenings.

WISE MAN
Do you believe in God?

BRIDGET
Oh, a good wife only believes in what her husband tells her.

WISE MAN
But sometimes, when the children are asleep
And I am in the school, do you not think
About the Martyrs and the saints and the angels,
And all the things that you believed in once?

BRIDGET
I think about nothing--sometimes I wonder if the linen is bleaching white, or I go out to see if the crows are picking up the chickens' food.

WISE MAN
My God,--my God! I will go out myself.
My pupils said that they would find a man
Whose faith I never shook--they may have found him.
Therefore I will go out--but if I go,
The glass will let the sands run out unseen.
I cannot go--I cannot leave the glass.
Go call my pupils--I can explain all now,
Only when all our hold on life is troubled,
Only in spiritual terror can the Truth
Come through the broken mind--as the pease burst
Out of a broken pease-cod.

[*He clutches Bridget as she is going.*

Say to them,
That Nature would lack all in her most need,
Could not the soul find truth as in a flash,
Upon the battle-field, or in the midst

Of overwhelming waves, and say to them--
But no, they would but answer as I bid.

BRIDGET
You want somebody to get up an argument with.

WISE MAN
Look out and see if there is any one
There in the street--I cannot leave the glass,
For somebody might shake it, and the sand
If it were shaken might run down on the instant.

BRIDGET
I don't understand a word you are saying. There's a crowd of people talking to your pupils.

WISE MAN
Go out and find if they have found a man
Who did not understand me when I taught,
Or did not listen.

BRIDGET
It is a hard thing to be married to a man of learning that must always be having arguments.

[*She goes out.*

WISE MAN
Strange that I should be blind to the great secret,
And that so simple a man might write it out
Upon a blade of grass or bit of rush

With naught but berry juice, and laugh to himself
Writing it out, because it was so simple.

[*Enter Bridget followed by the Fool.*

FOOL
Give me something; give me a penny to buy bacon in the shops and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak.

BRIDGET
I have no pennies. (*To Wise Man*) Your pupils cannot find anybody to argue with you. There's nobody in the whole country with belief enough for a lover's oath. Can't you be quiet now, and not always wanting to have arguments? It must be terrible to have a mind like that.

WISE MAN
Then I am lost indeed.

BRIDGET
Leave me alone now, I have to make the bread for you and the children.

[*She goes into kitchen.*

WISE MAN
Children, children!

BRIDGET
Your father wants you, run to him.

[*Children run in.*

WISE MAN
Come to me, children. Do not be afraid.
I want to know if you believe in Heaven,
God or the soul--no, do not tell me yet;
You need not be afraid I shall be angry,
Say what you please--so that it is your thought--
I wanted you to know before you spoke,
That I shall not be angry.

FIRST CHILD
We have not forgotten, Father.

SECOND CHILD
Oh no, Father.

BOTH CHILDREN
(*As if repeating a lesson*) There is nothing we cannot see, nothing we cannot touch.

FIRST CHILD
Foolish people used to say that there was, but you have taught us better.

WISE MAN
Go to your mother, go--yet do not go.
What can she say? If I am dumb you are lost;
And yet, because the sands are running out,
I have but a moment to show it all in. Children,
The sap would die out of the blades of grass
Had they a doubt. They understand it all,
Being the fingers of God’s certainty,

Yet can but make their sign into the air;
But could they find their tongues they'd show it all;
But what am I to say that am but one,
When they are millions and they will not speak--

[*Children have run out.*

But they are gone; what made them run away?

[*The Fool comes in with a dandelion.*

Look at me, tell me if my face is changed,
Is there a notch of the fiend's nail upon it
Already? Is it terrible to sight?
Because the moment's near.

[*Going to glass.*

I dare not look,
I dare not know the moment when they come.
No, no, I dare not. (*Covers glass.*)
Will there be a footfall,
Or will there be a sort of rending sound,
Or else a cracking, as though an iron claw
Had gripped the threshold stone?

[*Fool has begun to blow the dandelion.*

What are you doing?

FOOL
Wait a minute--four--five--six--

WISE MAN
What are you doing that for?

FOOL
I am blowing the dandelion to find out what hour it is.

WISE MAN
You have heard everything, and that is why
You'd find what hour it is--you'd find that out,
That you may look upon a fleet of devils
Dragging my soul away. You shall not stop,
I will have no one here when they come in,
I will have no one sitting there--no one--
And yet--and yet--there is something strange about you.
I half remember something. What is it?
Do you believe in God and in the soul?

FOOL
So you ask me now. I thought when you were asking your pupils, 'Will he ask Teigue the Fool? Yes, he will, he will; no, he will not--yes, he will.' But Teigue will say nothing. Teigue will say nothing.

WISE MAN
Tell me quickly.

FOOL
I said, 'Teigue knows everything, not even the green-eyed cats and the

hares that milk the cows have Teigue's wisdom'; but Teigue will not speak, he says nothing.

WISE MAN
Speak, speak, for underneath the cover there
The sand is running from the upper glass,
And when the last grain's through, I shall be lost.

FOOL
I will not speak. I will not tell you what is in my mind. I will not tell you what is in my bag. You might steal away my thoughts. I met a bodach on the road yesterday, and he said, 'Teigue, tell me how many pennies are in your bag; I will wager three pennies that there are not twenty pennies in your bag; let me put in my hand and count them.' But I gripped the bag the tighter, and when I go to sleep at night I hide the bag where nobody knows.

WISE MAN
There's but one pinch of sand, and I am lost
If you are not he I seek.

FOOL
O, what a lot the Fool knows, but he says nothing.

WISE MAN
Yes, I remember now. You spoke of angels.
You said but now that you had seen an angel.
You are the one I seek, and I am saved.

FOOL
Oh no. How could poor Teigue see angels? Oh, Teigue tells one tale here, another there, and everybody gives him pennies. If Teigue had not his tales he would starve.

[*He breaks away and goes out.*

WISE MAN
The last hope is gone,
And now that it's too late I see it all,
We perish into God and sink away
Into reality--the rest's a dream.

[*The Fool comes back.*

FOOL
There was one there--there by the threshold stone, waiting there; and he said, 'Go in, Teigue, and tell him everything that he asks you. He will give you a penny if you tell him.'

WISE MAN
I know enough, that know God's will prevails.

FOOL
Waiting till the moment had come--That is what the one out there was saying, but I might tell you what you asked. That is what he was saying.

WISE MAN
Be silent. May God's will prevail on the instant,
Although His will be my eternal pain.
I have no question:

It is enough, I know what fixed the station
Of star and cloud.
And knowing all, I cry
That what so God has willed
On the instant be fulfilled,
Though that be my damnation.
The stream of the world has changed its course,
And with the stream my thoughts have run
Into some cloudy thunderous spring
That is its mountain source--
Aye, to some frenzy of the mind,
For all that we have done's undone,
Our speculation but as the wind.

[*He dies.*

FOOL
Wise man--Wise man, wake up and I will tell you everything for a penny. It is I, poor Teigue the Fool. Why don't you wake up, and say, 'There is a penny for you, Teigue'? No, no, you will say nothing. You and I, we are the two fools, we know everything, but we will not speak.

[*Angel enters holding a casket.*

O, look what has come from his mouth! O, look what has come from his mouth--the white butterfly! He is dead, and I have taken his soul in my hands; but I know why you open the lid of that golden box. I must give it to you. There then, (*he puts butterfly in casket*) he has gone through his pains, and you will open the lid in the Garden of Paradise.

(*He closes curtain and remains outside it.*) He is gone, he is gone, he is gone, but come in, everybody in the world, and look at me.

‘I hear the wind a blow
I hear the grass a grow,
And all that I know, I know.’
But I will not speak, I will run away.

[*He goes out.*

At the Hawk's Well

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

THREE MUSICIANS (their faces made up to resemble masks)
THE GUARDIAN OF THE WELL (with face made up to resemble a mask)
AN OLD MAN (wearing a mask)
A YOUNG MAN (wearing a mask)
TIME the Irish Heroic Age

AT THE HAWK'S WELL

The stage is any bare space before a wall against which stands a patterned screen. A drum and a gong and a zither have been laid close to screen before the play begins. If necessary, they can be carried in, after the audience is seated, by the FIRST MUSICIAN, who also can attend to the lights if there is any special lighting. We had two lanterns upon posts -- designed by Mr. Dulac-- the outer corners of the stage, but they did not give enough light, and we found it better to play by the light of a large chandelier. Indeed, I think, -- so far as my present experience that the most effec-tive lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms. These masked players seem stranger when there is no mechanical means of separating them from us. The FIRST MUSICIAN carries with him a folded black cloth and goes to the centre of the stage toward, the front and stand, motionless, the folded cloth hanging from between his hands. The two other MUSICIANS enter and, after standing a moment at either side of the stage, go towards him and slowly unfold the cloth, singing as they do so:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare.

As they unfold the cloth, they go backward a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the FIRST MUSICIAN at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern

suggesting a hawk. The SECOND and THIRD MUSICIANS now slowly fold up the cloth again, pacing with a rhythmic movement of the arms towards the FIRST MUSICIAN and singing:

What were his life soon done!
Would he lose by that or win?
A mother that saw her son
Doubled over a speckled shin,
Cross-grained with ninety years,
Would cry, “How little worth
Were all my hopes and fears
And the hard pain of his birth!”

The words “a speckled shin” are familiar to readers of Irish legendary stories in descriptions of old men bent double over the fire. While the cloth has been spread out, the GUARDIAN OF THE WELL has entered and is now crouching upon the ground. She is entirely covered by a black cloak; beside her lies a square blue cloth to represent a well. The three MUSICIANS have taken their places against the wall beside their instruments of music; they will accompany the movements of the players with gong or drum or zither.

FIRST MUSICIAN (Singing)
The boughs of the hazel shake,
The sun goes down in the west.

SECOND MUSICIAN (Singing)
The heart would be always awake,
The heart would turn to its rest.

(They now go to one side of the stage rolling up the cloth)

FIRST MUSICIAN (Speaking) Night falls;
The mountainside grows dark;
The withered leaves of the hazel
Half choke the dry bed of the well;
The guardian. of the well is sitting
Upon the old grey stone at its side,
Worn out from raking its dry bed,
Worn out from gathering up the leaves.
Her heavy eyes
Know nothing, or but look upon stone.
The wind that blows out of the sea.
Turns over the heaped-up leaves to her side;
They rustle and diminish.

SECOND MUSICIAN I am afraid of this place.

BOTH MUSICIANS (Singing)
“Why should I sleep?” the heart cries,
“For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind,
Is beating a cloud through the skies;
I would wander always like the wind.”
(An OLD MAN enters through the audience)

FIRST MUSICIAN (Speaking) That old man climbs up hither,
Who has been watching by his well
These fifty years.
He is all doubled up with age;
The old thorn-trees, are doubled so
Among the rocks where he is climbing.

(The OLD MAN stands for a moment motionless by the side of the stage with bowed head. He lifts his head at the sound of a drumtap. He goes toward the front of the stage moving to the taps of the drum. He crouches and moves his hands as if making a fire. His movements, like those of the other persons of the play, suggest a marionette)

FIRST MUSICIAN (Speaking) He has made a little heap of leaves;
He lays the dry sticks on the leaves
And, shivering with cold, he has taken up
The fire-stick and socket from its hole.
He whirls it round to get a flame;
And now the dry sticks take the fire,
And now the fire leaps up and shines
Upon the hazels and the empty well.

MUSICIANS (Singing)
"O wind, 0 salt wind, 0 sea wind"'
Cries the heart, "it is time to sleep;
Why wander and nothing to find?
Better grow old and sleep."

OLD MAN (Speaking) Why don't you speak to me?
Why don't you say:
"Are you not weary gathering those sticks?
Are not your fingers cold?" You have not one word,
While yesterday you spoke three times. You said:
"The well is full of hazel leaves." You said:
"The wind is from the west." And after that:
"If there is rain it's likely there'll be mud."

To-day you are as stupid as a fish,
No, worse, worse, being less lively and as dumb.
(He goes near,)
Your eyes Ere dazed and heavy. If the Sidhe

[Note: The Sidhe are an ancient divine race (pronounced “She”) that had once possessed Ireland. Conquered by other gods, they be-came invisible and made their home in the hills and countryside.]

Must have a guardian to clean out the well
And drive the cattle off, they might choose somebody
That can be pleasant and companionable
Once in the day. Why do you stare like that?
You had that glassy look about the eyes
Last time it happened. Do you know anything?
It is enough to drive an old man crazy
To look all day upon these broken rocks,
And ragged thorns, and that one stupid face,
And speak and get no answer.

YOUNG MAN (Who has, entered through the audience during the last speech)
Then speak to me,
For youth is not more patient than old age;
And though I have trod the rocks for half a day
I cannot find what I am looking for.

OLD MAN Who speaks?
Who comes, so suddenly into this place
Where nothing thrives? If I may judge by the gold

0n head and feet and glittering in your coat,
You are not of those who hate the living world.

YOUNG MAN I am named Cuchulain, I am Sualtim's son.

[Note: The warrior Sualtim, a vague and shadowy figure of Irish myth, was held to be Cuhulin's mortal father. Cuchulain claimed supernatural descent as the son of Lugh, the Sun -God.

OLD MAN I have never heard that name.

YOUNG MAN It is not unknown.
I have an ancient house beyond the sea.

OLD MAN What mischief brings you hither?
You are like those
Who are crazy for the shedding of men's blood,
And for the love of women.

YOUNG MAN A rumour has led me,
A story told over the wine towards dawn.
I rose from table, found a boat, spread sail,
And with a lucky wind under the sail
Crossed waves that have seemed charmed, and found this shore.

OLD MAN There is no house to sack among these hills Nor beautiful woman to be carried off.
YOUNG MAN You should be native here, for that rough tongue
Matches the barbarous spot. You can, it may be,
Lead me to what I seek, a well wherein
Three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves,

And where a solitary girl keeps watch
Among grey boulders. He who drinks, they say,
Of that miraculous water lives for ever.

OLD MAN And are there not before your eyes at the instant
Grey boulders and a solitary girl And three stripped hazels?

YOUNG MAN But there is no well.

OLD MAN Can you see nothing yonder?

YOUNG MAN I but see
A hollow among stones half-full of leaves.

OLD MAN And do you think so great a gift is found
By no more toil than spreading out a sail,
And climbing a steep hill? 0, folly of youth,
Why should that hollow place fill up for you,
That will not fill for me? I have lain in wait
For more than fifty years, to find it empty,
Or but to find the stupid wind of the sea
Drive round the perishable leaves.

YOUNG MAN So it seems
There is some moment when the water fills it.

OLD MAN
A secret moment that the holy shades
That dance upon the desolate mountain know,
And not a living man, and when it comes
The water has scarce plashed before it is gone.

YOUNG MAN I will stand here and wait. Why should the luck
Of Sualtim's son desert him now? For ever
Have I had long to wait for anything.

OLD MAN No! Go from this accursed place! This place
Belongs to me, that girl there, and those others,
Deceivers of men.

YOUNG MAN And who are you who rail
Upon those dancers that all others bless?

OLD MAN One whom the dancers cheat. I came like you
When young in body and in mind, and blown
By what had seemed to me a lucky sail.
The well was dry, I sat upon its edge,
I waited the miraculous flood, I waited
While the years passed and withered me away.
I have snared the birds for food and eaten grass
And drunk the rain, and neither in dark nor shine
Wandered too far away to have heard the plash,
And yet the dancers have deceived me. Thrice
I have awakened from a sudden sleep
To find the stones were wet.

YOUNG MAN My luck is strong,
It will not leave me waiting, nor will they
That dance among the stones put me asleep;
If I grow drowsy I can pierce my foot.

OLD MAN No, do not pierce it, for the foot is tender,
It feels pain much. But find your sail again
And leave the well to me, for it belongs
To all that's old and withered.

YOUNG MAN No, I stay.
(The GUARDIAN OF THE WELL gives the cry of the hawk)
There is that bird again.

OLD MAN There is no bird.

YOUNG MAN It sounded like the sudden cry of a hawk,
But there's no wing in sight. As I came hither
A great grey hawk swept down out of the sky,
And though I have good hawks, the best in the world
I had fancied, I have not seen its like. It flew
As though it would have torn me with its beak,
Or blinded me, smiting with that great wing.
I had to draw my sword to drive it off,
And after that it flew from rock to rock.
I pelted it with stones, a good half-hour,
And just before I had turned the big rock there
And seen this place, it seemed to vanish away.
Could I but find a means to bring it down
I'd hood it.

OLD MAN The Woman of the Sidhe herself,
The mountain witch, the unappeasable shadow.
She is always flitting upon this mountain-side,
To allure or to destroy. When she has shown

Herself to the fierce women of the hills
Under that shape they offer sacrifice
And arm for battle. There falls a curse
On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes;
So get you gone while you have that proud step
And confident voice, for not a man alive
Has so much luck that he can play with it.
Those that have long to live should fear her most,
The old are cursed already. That curse may be
Never to win a woman's love and keep it;
Or always to mix hatred in the love;
Or it may be that she will kill your children,
That you will find them, their throats torn and bloody,
Or you will be so maddened that you kill them
With your own hand.

YOUNG MAN Have you been set down there
To threaten all who come, and scare them off?
You seem as dried up as the leaves and sticks,
As though you had no part in life.

(The GUARDIAN OF THE WELL gives hawk cry again.) That cry!
There is that cry again. That woman made it,
But why does she cry out as the hawk cries?

OLD MAN It was her mouth, and yet not she, that cried.
It was that shadow cried behind her mouth;
And now I know why she has been so stupid
All the day through, and had such heavy eyes.

Look at her shivering now, the terrible life
Is slipping through her veins. She is possessed.
Who knows whom she will murder or betray
Before she awakes in ignorance of it all,
And gathers up the leaves? But they'll be wet;
The water will have come and gone again;
That shivering is the sign. O, get you gone,
At any moment now I shall hear it bubble.
If you are good you will leave it. I am old,
And if I do not drink it now, will ever;
I have been watching all my life and maybe
Only a little cupful will bubble up.

YOUNG MAN I'll take it in my hands. We shall both drink,
And even if there are but a few drops, Share them.

OLD MAN But swear that I may drink the first;
The young are greedy, and if you drink the first
You'll drink it all. Ah, you have looked at her;
She has felt your gaze and turned her eyes on us;
I cannot bear her eyes, they are not of this world,
Nor moist, nor faltering; they are no girl's eyes.
(He covers his had. The GUARDIAN OF THE WELL throws off her cloak and rises. Her dress under the cloak suggests a hawk)

YOUNG MAN Why do you fix those eyes of a hawk
upon me?
I am not afraid of you, bird, woman, or witch.
(He goes to the side of the well, which the GUARD-IAN OF THE WELL

has left)
Do what you will, I shall not leave this place
Till I have grown immortal like yourself.

(He has sat down; the GUARDIAN OF THE WELL has begun to dance, moving like a hawk. The OLD MAN sleeps. The dance goes on for some time)

FIRST MUSICIAN (Singing or half-singing)
0 God, protect me
From a horrible deathless body
Sliding through the veins of a sudden.
(*The dance goes on for some time. The YOUNG MAN rises slowly*)

FIRST MUSICIAN (*Speaking*) The madness has laid hold upon him now,
For he grows pale and staggers to his feet. (*The dance goes on*)

YOUNG MAN Run where you will,
Grey bird , you shall be perched upon my wrist.
Some were called queens and yet have been perched there.
(*The dance goes on*)

FIRST MUSICIAN (*Speaking*) I have heard water plash; it comes, it comes;
Look where it glitters. He has heard the plash;
Look, he has turned his head.

(The GUARDIAN OF THE WELL has gone out. The YOUNG MAN drops his spear, as if in a dream and goes out)

MUSICIANS (*Singing*)
He has lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial-mound
And all the history ends.
He might have lived at his ease,
An old dog's head on his knees,
Among his children and friends.

(The OLD MAN creeps up to the well)

OLD MAN The accursed shadows have deluded me,
The stones are dark and yet the well is empty;
The water flowed and emptied while I slept.
You have deluded me my whole life through,
Accursed dancers, you have stolen my life.
That there should be such evil in a Shadow!

YOUNG MAN (*Entering*) She has fled from me and hidden in the rocks.

OLD MAN She has but led you from the fountain. Look!
Though stones and leaves are dark where it has flowed,
There's not a drop to drink.
(The MUSICIANS cry "Aoife!" "Aoife!" and strike gong)

YOUNG MAN What are those cries?
What is that Sound that runs along the hill?
Who are they that beat a sword upon a shield?

OLD MAN She has roused up the fierce women of the hills,
Aoife, and all her troop, to take your life,

And never till you are lying in the earth Can you know rest.

[Note: Aoife was a warrior queen whom Cuhulain defeated in battle. The two subsequently became lovers. After his departure, Aoife bore Cuchulain a son, Conlaoch, who was later killed by his, father unwittingly, in combat.]

YOUNG MAN The clash of arms again!

OLD MAN 0, do not go! The mountain is accursed;
Stay with me, I have nothing more to lose,
I do not now deceive you.

YOUNG MAN I will face them.
(He goes out, no longer, as if in dream, but shouldering his spear, and calling)
He comes! Cuchulain, son of Sualtim, comes!
(The MUSICIANS stand up; one goes to centre with folded cloth. The others unfold it. While they do so they sing. During the singing, and while hidden by the cloth, the OLD MAN goes out. When the play is performed with Mr. Dulac's music, the musicians do not rise or unfold the cloth till after they have sung the words "a bitter life.")

(Songs for the unfolding and folding of the cloth)
Come to me, human faces,
Familiar memories;
I have found hateful eyes
Among the desolate places,
Unfaltering, unmoistened eyes.

Folly alone I cherish,
I choose it for my share;
Being but a mouthful of air,
I am content to perish;
I am but a mouthful of Sweet air.

O lamentable shadows,
Obscurity of strife!
I choose a pleasant life
Among indolent meadows;
Wisdom must live a bitter life.
(Then they fold up the cloth, singing)

“The man that I praise,”
Cries out the empty well,
“Lives all his days
Where a hand on the bell
Can call the milch cows
To the comfortable door of his house.
Who but an idiot would praise
Dry stones in a well?”

“The man that I praise,”
Cries out the leafless tree,
“Has married and stays
By an old hearth, and he
On naught has set store
But children. and dogs on the floor.
Who but an idiot would praise

A withered tree?”

(They go out)

Curtain

The Dreaming of the Bones

The stage is any bare place in a room close to the wall. A screen with a pattern of mountain and sky can stand against the wall, or a curtain with a like pattern hang upon it, but the pattern must only symbolize or suggest. One musician enters and then two others, the first stands singing while the others take their places. Then all three sit down against the wall by their instruments, which are already there — a drum, a zither, and a flute. Or they unfold a cloth as in 'The Hawk's Well,' while the instruments are carried in.

FIRST MUSICIAN

(or all three musicians, singing) Why does my heart beat so? Did not a shadow pass? It passed but a moment ago. Who can have trod in the grass? What rogue is night-wandering? Have not old writers said That dizzy dreams can spring From the dry bones of the dead? And many a night it seems That all the valley fills With those fantastic dreams. They overflow the hills, So passionate is a shade, Like wine that fills to the top A grey-green cup of jade, Or maybe an agate cup. (speaking) The hour before dawn and the moon covered up. The little village of Abbey is covered up; The little narrow trodden way that runs From the white road to the Abbey of Corcomroe Is covered up; and all about the hills Are like a circle of Agate or of Jade. Somewhere among great rocks on the scarce grass Birds cry, they cry their loneliness. Even the sunlight can be lonely here, Even hot noon is lonely. I hear a footfall — A young man with a lantern comes this way. He seems an Aran fisher, for he wears The flannel bawneen and the cow-hide shoe. He stumbles wearily, and stumbling prays.

(A young man enters, praying in Irish)

Once more the birds cry in their loneliness, But now they wheel about our heads; and now They have dropped on the grey stone to the north-east.

(A man and a girl both in the costume of a past time, come in. They wear heroic masks)

YOUNG MAN
(raising his lantern) Who is there? I cannot see what you are like, Come to the light.

STRANGER
But what have you to fear?

YOUNG MAN
And why have you come creeping through the dark.

(The Girl blows out lantern)

The wind has blown my lantern out. Where are you? I saw a pair of heads against the sky And lost them after, but you are in the right I should not be afraid in County Clare; And should be or should not be have no choice, I have to put myself into your hands, Now that my candle's out.

STRANGER
You have fought in Dublin?

YOUNG MAN
I was in the Post Office, and if taken I shall be put against a wall and shot.

STRANGER
You know some place of refuge, have some plan Or friend who will come to meet you?

YOUNG MAN
I am to lie At daybreak on the mountain and keep watch Until an Aran coracle puts in At Muckanish or at the rocky shore Under Finvarra, but would break my neck If I went stumbling there alone in the dark.

STRANGER
We know the pathways that the sheep tread out, And all the hiding-places of the hills, And that they had better hiding-places once.

YOUNG MAN
You'd say they had better before English robbers Cut down the trees or set them upon fire For fear their owners might find shelter there. What is that sound?

STRANGER
An old horse gone astray He has been wandering on the road all night.

YOUNG MAN
I took him for a man and horse. Police Are out upon the roads. In the late Rising I think there was no man of us but hated To fire at soldiers who but did their duty And were not of our race, but when a man Is born in Ireland and of Irish stock When he takes part against us —

STRANGER
I will put you safe, No living man shall set his eyes upon you. I will not answer for the dead.

YOUNG MAN
The dead?

STRANGER
For certain days the stones where you must lie Have in the hour before the break of day Been haunted.

YOUNG MAN
But I was not born at midnight.

STRANGER
Many a man born in the full daylight Can see them plain, will pass them on the high-road Or in the crowded market-place of the town, And never know that they have passed.

YOUNG MAN
My Grandam Would have it they did penance everywhere Or lived through their old lives again.

STRANGER
In a dream; And some for an old scruple must hang spitted Upon the swaying tops of lofty trees; Some are consumed in fire, some withered up By hail and sleet out of the wintry North, And some but live through their old lives again.

YOUNG MAN
Well, let them dream into what shape they please And fill waste mountains with the invisible tumult Of the fantastic conscience. I have no dread; They cannot put me into jail or shoot me, And seeing that their blood has returned

to fields That have grown red from drinking blood like mine They would not if they could betray.

STRANGER
This pathway Runs to the ruined Abbey of Corcomroe; The Abbey passed, we are soon among the stone And shall be at the ridge before the cocks Of Aughanish or Bailevlehan Or grey Aughtmana shake their wings and cry.

(They go round the stage once)

FIRST MUSICIAN
(speaking) They've passed the shallow well and the flat stone Fouled by the drinking cattle, the narrow lane Where mourners for five centuries have carried Noble or peasant to his burial. An owl is crying out above their heads. (singing) Why should the heart take fright What sets it beating so? The bitter sweetness of the night Has made it but a lonely thing. Red bird of March, begin to crow, Up with the neck and clap the wing, Red cock, and crow.

(They go once round the stage. The first musician speaks.)

And now they have climbed through the long grassy field And passed the ragged thorn trees and the gap In the ancient hedge; and the tomb-nested owl At the foot's level beats with a vague wing. (singing) My head is in a cloud; I'd let the whole world go. My rascal heart is proud Remembering and remembering. Red bird of March, begin to crow, Up with the neck and clap the wing Red cock and crow.

(They go round the stage. The first musician speaks.)

They are among the stones above the ash Above the briar and thorn and the scarce grass; Hidden amid the shadow far below them The cat-headed bird is crying out. (singing) The dreaming bones cry out Because the night winds blow And heaven's a cloudy blot; Calamity can have its fling. Red bird of March begin to crow, Up with the neck and clap the wing Red cock and crow.

THE STRANGER
We're almost at the summit and can rest. The road is a faint shadow there; and there The abbey lies amid its broken tombs. In the old days we should have heard a bell Calling the monks before day broke to pray; And when the day has broken on the ridge, The crowing of its cocks.

YOUNG MAN
Is there no house Famous for sanctity or architectural beauty In Clare or Kerry, or in all wide Connacht The enemy has not unroofed?

STRANGER
Close to the altar Broken by wind and frost and worn by time Donogh O'Brien has a tomb, a name in Latin. He wore fine clothes and knew the secrets of women But he rebelled against the King of Thomond And died in his youth.

YOUNG MAN
And why should he rebel? The King of Thomond was his rightful master. It was men like Donogh who made Ireland weak — My curse on all that troop, and when I die I'll leave my body, if I have any choice, Far from his ivy tod and his owl; have those Who, if your tale is true, work out a penance Upon the mountain-top where I am to hide, Come from the Abbey graveyard?

THE GIRL
They have not that luck, But are more lonely, those that are buried there, Warred in the heat of the blood; if they were rebels Some momentary impulse made them rebels Or the comandment of some petty king Who hated Thomond. Being but common sinners, No callers in of the alien from oversea They and their enemies of Thomond's party Mix in a brief dream battle above their bones, Or make one drove or drift in amity, Or in the hurry of the heavenly round Forget their earthly names; these are alone Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN
And if what seems is true And there are more upon the other side Than on this side of death, many a ghost Must meet them face to face and pass the word Even upon this grey and desolate hill.

YOUNG GIRL
Until this hour no ghost or living man Has spoken though seven centuries have run Since they, weary of life and of men's eyes, Flung down their bones in some forgotten place Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN
I have heard that there are souls Who, having sinned after a monstrous fashion Take on them, being dead, a monstrous image To drive the living, should they meet its face, Crazy, and be a terror to the dead.

YOUNG GIRL
But these Were comely even in their middle life And carry, now that they are dead, the image Of their first youth, for it was in that youth Their sin began.

YOUNG MAN
I have heard of angry ghosts Who wander in a wilful solitude.

THE GIRL
These have no thought but love; nor joy But that upon the instant when their penance Draws to its height and when two hearts are wrung Nearest to breaking, if hearts of shadows break, His eyes can mix with hers; nor any pang That is so bitter as that double glance, Being accursed.

YOUNG MAN
But what is this strange penance — That when their eyes have met can wring them most?

THE GIRL
Though eyes can meet, their lips can never meet.

YOUNG MAN
And yet it seems they wander side by side. But doubtless you would say that when lips meet And have not living nerves, it is no meeting.

THE GIRL
Although they have no blood or living nerves Who once lay warm and live the live-long night In one another’s arms, and know their part In life, being now but of the people of dreams, Is a dreams part; although they are but shadows Hovering between a thorn tree and a stone Who have heaped up night on winged night; although No shade however harried and consumed Would change his own calamity for theirs, Their manner of life were blessed could their lips A moment meet; but when he has bent his head Close to her head or hand would slip in hand The memory of their crime flows up between And drives them apart.

YOUNG MAN
The memory of a crime — He took her from a husband's house it may be,
But does the penance for a passionate sin Last for so many centuries?

THE GIRL
No, no, The man she chose, the man she was chosen by Cared little and cares little from whose house They fled towards dawn amid the flights of arrows Or that it was a husband's and a king's; And how if that were all could she lack friends On crowded roads or on the unpeopled hill? Helen herself had opened wide the door Where night by night she dreams herself awake And gathers to her breast a dreaming man.

YOUNG MAN
What crime can stay so in the memory? What crime can keep apart the lips of lovers Wandering and alone?

THE GIRL
Her king and lover Was overthrown in battle by her husband And for her sake and for his own, being blind And bitter and bitterly in love, he brought A foreign army from across the sea.

YOUNG MAN
You speak of Dermot and of Dervorgilla Who brought the Norman in?

THE GIRL
Yes, yes I spoke Of that most miserable, most accursed pair Who sold their country into slavery, and yet They were not wholly miserable and accursed If somebody of their race at last would say: 'I have forgiven them.'

YOUNG MAN
Oh, never, never Will Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven.

THE GIRL
If someone of their race forgave at last Lip would be pressed on lip.

YOUNG MAN
Oh, never, never Will Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven. You have told your story well, so well indeed I could not help but fall into the mood And for a while believe that it was true Or half believe, but better push on now. The horizon to the East is growing bright.

(They go once round stage)

So here we're on the summit. I can see The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills, And Galway in the breaking light; there too The enemy has toppled wall and roof And torn from ancient walls to boil his pot The oaken panelling that had been dear To generations of children and old men. But for that pair for whom you would have my pardon It might be now like Bayeux or like Caen Or little Italian town amid its walls For though we have neither coal nor iron ore To make us rich and cover heaven with smoke Our country, if that crime were uncommitted Had been most beautiful. Why do you dance? Why do you gaze and with so passionate eyes One on the other and then turn away Covering your eyes and weave it in a dance, Who are you? what are you? you are not natural.

THE GIRL
Seven hundred years our lips have never met.

YOUNG MAN
Why do you look so strangely at one another, So strangely and so sweetly?

THE GIRL
Seven hundred years.

YOUNG MAN
So strangely and so sweetly. All the ruin, All, all their handiwork is blown away As though the mountain air had blown it away Because their eyes have met. They cannot hear, Being folded up and hidden in their dance. The dance is changing now. They have dropped their eyes, They have covered up their eyes as though their hearts Had suddenly been broken — never, never Shall Dermot and Dervorgilla be forgiven. They have drifted in the dance from rock to rock. They have raised their hands as though to snatch the sleep That lingers always in the abyss of the sky Though they can never reach it. A cloud floats up And covers all the mountain head in a moment. And now it lifts and they are swept away. I had almost yielded and forgiven it all — This is indeed a place of terrible temptation.

(The Musicians begin unfolding and folding a black cloth. The First Musician comes forward to the front of the stage, at the centre. He holds the cloth before him. The other two come one on either side and unfold it. They afterwards fold it up in the same way. While it is unfolded, the Young Man leaves the stage)

THE MUSICIANS
I

(singing) At the grey round of the hill Music of a lost kingdom Runs, runs and is suddenly still. The winds out of Clare-Galway Carry it: suddenly it is

still.

I have heard in the night air A wandering airy music; And moidered in that snare A man is lost of a sudden, In that sweet wandering snare.

What finger first began Music of a lost kingdom. They dreamed that laughed in the sun. Dry bones that dream are bitter, They dream and darken our sun.

Those crazy fingers play A wandering airy music; Our luck is withered away, And wheat in the wheat-ear withered, And the wind blows it away.

II

My heart ran wild when it heard The curlew cry before dawn And the eddying cat-headed bird; But now the night is gone. I have heard from far below The strong March birds a-crow, Stretch neck and clap the wing, Red cocks, and crow.

The Only Jealousy of Emer

Enter Musicians, who are dressed as in the earlier play. They have the same musical instruments, which can either be already upon the stage or be brought in by the First Musician before he stands in the centre with the cloth between his hands, or by a player when the cloth is unfolded. The stage as before can be against the wall of any room.

FIRST MUSICIAN
(During the unfolding and folding of the cloth)

A woman's beauty is like a white Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone At daybreak after stormy night Between two furrows upon the ploughed land: A sudden storm and it was thrown Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land. How many centuries spent The sedentary soul In toils of measurement Beyond eagle or mole, Beyond hearing or seeing, Or Archimedes guess, To raise into being That loveliness?

A strange unserviceable thing, A fragile, exquisite, pale shell, That the vast troubled waters bring To the loud sands before day has broken. The storm arose and suddenly fell Amid the dark before day had broken. What death? what discipline? What bonds no man could unbind Being imagined within The labyrinth of the mind? What pursuing or fleeing? What wounds, what bloody press? Dragged into being This loveliness.

(When the cloth is folded again the Musicians take their place against wall. The folding of the cloth shows on one side of the stage the curtained bed or litter on which lies a man in his grave-clothes. He wears an heroic mask.

Another man with exactly similar clothes and mask crouches near the front. Emer is sitting beside the bed.)

FIRST MUSICIAN

(speaking) I call before the eyes a roof With cross-beams darkened by smoke. A fisher's net hangs from a beam, A long oar lies against the wall. I call up a poor fisher's house. A man lies dead or swooning, That amorous man, That amorous, violent man, renowned Cuchulain, Queen Emer at his side. At her own bidding all the rest have gone. But now one comes on hesitating feet, Young Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's mistress. She stands a moment in the open door, Beyond the open door the bitter sea, The shining, bitter sea is crying out, (singing) White shell, white wing I will not choose for my friend A frail unserviceable thing That drifts and dreams, and but knows That waters are without end And that wind blows.

EMER

(speaking) Come hither, come sit down beside the bed You need not be afraid, for I myself Sent for you, Eithne Inguba.

EITHNE INGUBA

No, Madam, I have too deeply wronged you to sit there.

EMER

Of all the people in the world we two, And we alone, may watch together here, Because we have loved him best.

EITHNE INGUBA

And is he dead?

EMER

Although they have dressed him out in his grave-clothes And stretched his limbs, Cuchulain is not dead; The very heavens when that day's at hand, So that his death may not lack ceremony, Will throw out fires, and the earth grow red with blood. There shall not be a scullion but foreknows it Like the world's end.

EITHNE INGUBA

How did he come to this?

EMER

Towards noon in the assembly of the kings He met with one who seemed a while most dear. The kings stood round; some quarrel was blown up; He drove him out and killed him on the shore At Baile's tree, and he who was so killed Was his own son begot on some wild woman When he was young, or so I have heard it said; And thereupon, knowing what man he had killed, And being mad with sorrow, he ran out; And after to his middle in the foam With shield before him and with sword in hand, He fought the deathless sea. The kings looked on And not a king dared stretch an arm, or even Dared call his name, but all stood wondering In that dumb stupor like cattle in a gale, Until at last, as though he had fixed his eyes On a new enemy, he waded out Until the water had swept over him; But the waves washed his senseless image up And laid it at this door.

EITHNE INGUBA

How pale he looks!

EMER

He is not dead.

EITHNE INGUBA
You have not kissed his lips Nor laid his head upon your breast.

EMER
It may be An image has been put into his place, A sea-born log bewitched into his likeness, Or some stark horseman grown too old to ride Among the troops of Mananan, Son of the Sea, Now that his joints are stiff.

EITHNE INGUBA
Cry out his name. All that are taken from our sight, they say, Loiter amid the scenery of their lives For certain hours or days, and should he hear He might, being angry drive the changeling out.

EMER
It is hard to make them hear amid their darkness, And it is long since I could call him home; I am but his wife, but if you cry aloud With that sweet voice that is so dear to him He cannot help but listen.

EITHNE INGUBA
He loves me best, Being his newest love, but in the end Will love the woman best who loved him first And loved him through the years when love seemed lost.

EMER
I have that hope, the hope that some day and somewhere We'll sit together at the hearth again.

EITHNE INGUBA
Women like me when the violent hour is over Are flung into some corner like old nut shells. Cuchulain, listen.

EMER
No, not yet for first I'll cover up his face to hide the sea; And throw new logs upon the hearth and stir The half burnt logs until they break in flame. Old Mananan's unbridled horses come Out of the sea and on their backs his horsemen But all the enchantments of the dreaming foam Dread the hearth fire.

(She pulls the curtains of the bed so as to hide the sick man's face, that the actor may change his mask unseen. She goes to one side of platform and moves her hand as though putting logs on a fire and stirring it into a blaze. While she makes these movements the Musicians play, marking the movements with drum and flute perhaps.

Having finished she stands beside the imaginary fire at a distance from Cuchulain & Eithne Inguba.)

Call on Cuchulain now.

EITHNE INGUBA
Can you not hear my voice.

EMER
Bend over him. Call out dear secrets till you have touched his heart If he lies there; and if he is not there Till you have made him jealous.

EITHNE INGUBA
Cuchulain, listen.

EMER
You speak too timidly; to be afraid Because his wife is but three paces off

When there is so great a need were but to prove The man that chose you made but a poor choice. We're but two women struggling with the sea.

EITHNE INGUBA
O my beloved pardon me, that I Have been ashamed and you in so great need. I have never sent a message or called out, Scarce had a longing for your company But you have known and come; and if indeed You are lying there stretch out your arms and speak; Open your mouth and speak for to this hour My company has made you talkative. Why do you mope, and what has closed your ears. Our passion had not chilled when we were parted On the pale shore under the breaking dawn. He will not hear me: or his ears are closed And no sound reaches him.

EMER
Then kiss that image The pressure of your mouth upon his mouth May reach him where he is.

EITHNE INGUBA
(starting back) It is no man. I felt some evil thing that dried my heart When my lips touched it.

EMER
No, his body stirs; The pressure of your mouth has called him home; He has thrown the changeling out.

EITHNE INGUBA
(going further off) Look at that arm That arm is withered to the very socket.

EMER
(going up to the bed) What do you come for and from where?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
I have come From Mananan's court upon a bridleless horse.

EMER
What one among the Sidhe has dared to lie Upon Cuchulain's bed and take his image?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
I am named Bricriu — not the man — that Bricriu, Maker of discord among gods and men, Called Bricriu of the Sidhe.

EMER
Come for what purpose?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
(sitting up and showing its distorted face. Eithne Inguba goes out)

I show my face and everything he loves Must fly away.

EMER
You people of the wind Are full of lying speech and mockery. I have not fled your face.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
You are not loved.

EMER
And therefore have no dread to meet your eyes And to demand him of you.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
For that I have come. You have but to pay the price and he is free.

EMER
Do the Sidhe bargain?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
When they set free a captive They take in ransom a less valued thing. The fisher when some knowledgeable man Restores to him his wife, or son, or daughter, Knows he must lose a boat or net, or it may be The cow that gives his children milk; and some Have offered their own lives. I do not ask Your life, or any valuable thing; You spoke but now of the mere chance that some day You'd sit together by the hearth again; Renounce that chance, that miserable hour, And he shall live again.

EMER
I do not question But you have brought ill luck on all he loves And now, because I am thrown beyond your power Unless your words are lies, you come to bargain.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
You loved your power when but newly married And I love mine although I am old and withered; You have but to put yourself into that power And he shall live again.

EMER
No, never, never.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
You dare not be accursed yet he has dared.

EMER
I have but two joyous thoughts, two things I prize, A hope, a memory, and

now you claim that hope.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
He'll never sit beside you at the hearth Or make old bones, but die of wounds and toil On some far shore or mountain, a strange woman Beside his mattress.

EMER
You ask for my one hope That you may bring your curse on all about him.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
You've watched his loves and you have not been jealous Knowing that he would tire, but do those tire That love the Sidhe?

EMER
What dancer of the Sidhe What creature of the reeling moon has pursued him?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
I have but to touch your eyes and give them sight; But stand at my left side.

(He touches her eyes with his left hand, the right being withered)

EMER
My husband there.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
But out of reach — I have dissolved the dark That hid him from your eyes but not that other That's hidden you from his.

EMER
Husband, husband!

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
Be silent, he is but a phantom now And he can neither touch, nor hear, nor see; The longing and the cries have drawn him hither. He heard no sound, heard no articulate sound; They could but banish rest, and make him dream, And in that dream, as do all dreaming shades Before they are accustomed to their freedom, He has taken his familiar form, and yet He crouches there not knowing where he is Or at whose side he is crouched.

(a Woman of the Sidhe has entered and stands a little inside the door)

EMER
Who is this woman?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
She has hurried from the Country-Under-Wave And dreamed herself into that shape that he May glitter in her basket; for the Sidhe Are fishers also and they fish for men With dreams upon the hook.

EMER
And so that woman Has hid herself in this disguise and made Herself into a lie.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
A dream is body; The dead move ever towards a dreamless youth And when they dream no more return no more; And those more holy shades that never lived But visit you in dreams.

EMER

I know her sort. They find our men asleep, weary with war, Or weary with the chase and kiss their lips And drop their hair upon them, from that hour Our men, who yet knew nothing of it all, Are lonely, and when at fall of night we press Their hearts upon our hearts their hearts are cold.

(She draws a knife from her girdle)

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN

And so you think to wound her with a knife. She has an airy body. Look and listen; I have not given you eyes and ears for nothing.

(The Woman of the Sidhe moves round the crouching Ghost of Cuchulain at front of stage in a dance that grows gradually quicker, as he slowly awakes. At moments she may drop her hair upon his head but she does not kiss him. She is accompanied by string and flute and drum. Her mask and clothes must suggest gold or bronze or brass or silver so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements. Her hair too, must keep the metallic suggestion.)

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Who is it stands before me there Shedding such light from limb and hair As when the moon complete at last With every labouring crescent past, And lonely with extreme delight, Flings out upon the fifteenth night?

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Because I long I am not complete. What pulled your hands about your feet And your head down upon your knees, And hid your face?

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

Old memories: A dying boy, with handsome face Upturned upon a beaten place; A sacred yew-tree on a strand; A woman that held in steady hand In all the happiness of her youth Before her man had broken troth, A burning wisp to light the door; And many a round or crescent more; Dead men and women. Memories Have pulled my head upon my knees.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Could you that have loved many a woman That did not reach beyond the human, Lacking a day to be complete, Love one that though her heart can beat, Lacks it but by an hour or so.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

I know you now for long ago I met you on the mountain side, Beside a well that seemed long dry, Beside old thorns where the hawk flew. I held out arms and hands but you, That now seem friendly, fled away Half woman and half bird of prey.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Hold out your arms and hands again You were not so dumbfounded when I was that bird of prey and yet I am all woman now.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN

I am not The young and passionate man I was And though that brilliant light surpass All crescent forms, my memories Weigh down my hands, abash my eyes.

WOMAN of the SIDHE

Then kiss my mouth. Though memory Be beauty’s bitterest enemy I have

no dread for at my kiss Memory on the moment vanishes: Nothing but beauty can remain.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
And shall I never know again Intricacies of blind remorse?

WOMAN of the SIDHE
Time shall seem to stay his course, For when your mouth and my mouth meet All my round shall be complete Imagining all its circles run; And there shall be oblivion Even to quench Cuchulain's drouth, Even to still that heart.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
Your mouth.

(They are about to kiss, he turns away)

O Emer, Emer.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
So then it is she Made you impure with memory.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
Still in that dream I see you stand, A burning wisp in your right hand, To wait my coming to the house, As when our parents married us.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
Being among the dead you love her That valued every slut above her While you still lived.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
O my lost Emer.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
And there is not a loose-tongued schemer But could draw you if not dead, From her table and her bed. How could you be fit to wive With flesh and blood, being born to live Where no one speaks of broken troth For all have washed out of their eyes Wind blown dirt of their memories To improve their sight?

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
Your mouth, your mouth.

(Their lips approach but Cuchulain turns away as Emer speaks.)

EMER
If he may live I am content, Content that he shall turn on me, If but the dead will set him free That I may speak with him at whiles, Eyes that the cold moon or the harsh sea Or what I know not's made indifferent.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
What a wise silence has fallen in this dark! I know you now in all your ignorance Of all whereby a lover's quiet is rent. What dread so great as that he should forget The least chance sight or sound, or scratch or mark On an old door, or frail bird heard and seen In the incredible clear light love cast All round about her some forlorn lost day? That face, though fine enough, is a fool's face And there's a folly in the deathless Sidhe Beyond man's reach.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
I told you to forget After my fashion; you would have none of it; So now

you may forget in a man's fashion. There's an unbridled horse at the sea's edge. Mount; it will carry you in an eye's wink To where the King of Country-Under-Wave, Old Mananan, nods above the board and moves His chessmen in a dream. Demand your life And come again on the unbridled horse.

GHOST of CUCHULAIN
Forgive me those rough words. How could you know That man is held to those whom he has loved By pain they gave, or pain that he has given, Intricacies of pain.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
I am ashamed That being of the deathless shades I chose A man so knotted to impurity.

(The Ghost of Cuchulain goes out)

WOMAN of the SIDHE (to Figure of Cuchulain)

To you that have no living light, but dropped From a last leprous crescent of the moon, I owe it all.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
Because you have failed I must forego your thanks, I that took pity Upon your love and carried out your plan To tangle all his life and make it nothing That he might turn to you.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
Was it from pity You taught the woman to prevail against me?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
You know my nature — by what name I am called.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
Was it from pity that you hid the truth That men are bound to women by the wrongs They do or suffer?

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
You know what being I am.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
I have been mocked and disobeyed — your power Was more to you than my good-will, and now I'll have you learn what my ill-will can do; I lay you under bonds upon the instant To stand before our King and face the charge And take the punishment.

FIGURE of CUCHULAIN
I'll stand there first. And tell my story first, and Mananan Knows that his own harsh sea made my heart cold.

WOMAN of the SIDHE
My horse is there and shall outrun your horse.

(The Figure of Cuchulain falls back, the Woman of the Sidhe goes out. Drum taps, music resembling horse hoofs.)

EITHNE INGUBA (entering quickly)

I heard the beat of hoofs, but saw no horse, And then came other hoofs and after that I heard low angry cries and thereupon I ceased to be afraid.

EMER
Cuchulain wakes.

(The figure turns round. It once more wears the heroic mask.)

CUCHULAIN
Eithne Inguba take me in your arms, I have been in some strange place and am afraid.

(The First Musician comes to the front of stage, the others from each side and unfold the cloth singing)

THE MUSICIANS
What makes her heart beat thus, Plain to be understood I have met in a man's house A statue of solitude, Moving there and walking; Its strange heart beating fast For all our talking. O still that heart at last.

O bitter reward! Of many a tragic tomb! And we though astonished are dumb And give but a sigh and a word A passing word.

Although the door be shut And all seem well enough, Although wide world hold not A man but will give you his love. The moment he has looked at you, He that has loved the best May turn from a statue His too human breast.

O bitter reward! Of many a tragic tomb! And we though astonished are dumb Or give but a sigh and a word A passing word.

What makes your heart so beat? Some one should stay at her side. When beauty is complete Her own thought will have died And danger not be

diminished; Dimmed at three quarter light When moon’s round is finished The stars are out of sight.

O bitter reward! Of many a tragic tomb! And we though astonished are dumb Or give but a sigh and a word A passing word.

(*When the cloth is folded again the stage is bare*.)

Calvary

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Three Musicians (their *faces made up to resemble masks)*

Christ (wearing a *mask)*

Lazarus (wearing a mask)

Judas (wearing a *mask)*

Three Roman Soldiers (their *faces masked or made up to resemble masks) At the beginning of the play the First Musician comes to the front of the bare place, round three sides of which the audience are seated, with a folded cloth hanging from his joined hands. Two other Musi cians come,... one from either side, and unfold the cloth so that* it *shuts out the stage, and then fold it again, singing and moving rhythmically. They do the same at the end of the play, which enables the players to leave the stage unseen.* [Song *for the folding and unfolding of the cloth]*

CALVARY

First Musician.

Motionless under the moon-beam,
Up to his feathers in the stream;
Although fish leap, the white heron
Shivers in a dumbfounded dream.

Second Musician.

God has not died for the white heron.

Third Musician.

Although half famished he'll not dare
Dip or do anything but stare
Upon the glittering image of a heron,
That now is lost and now is there.

Second Musician.

God has not died for the white heron.

First Musician.

But that the full is shortly gone
And after that is crescent moon,
It's certain that the moon-crazed heron
Would be but fishes' diet soon.

Second Musician.

God has not died for the white heron.

[The *three Musicians are now seated by the drum, flute, and zither at the back of stage.*

First Musician. The road to Calvary, and I beside it
Upon an ancient stone. Good Friday's come,
The day whereon Christ dreams His passion through.
He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs.
The cross that but exists because He dreams it
Shortens His breath and wears away His strength.
And now He stands amid a mocking crowd,
Heavily breathing.
[A *player with the mask of Christ and carrying a cross has entered and now stands leaning upon the cross.*
Those that are behind
Climb on the shoulders of the men in front
To shout their mockery: 'Work a miracle,'
Cries one, 'and save yourself'; another cries,
'Call on your father now before your bones
Have been picked bare by the great desert birds';
Another cries, 'Call out with a loud voice
And tell him that his son is cast away
Amid the mockery of his enemies.'

[Singing]
O, but the mockers' cry
Makes my heart afraid,
As though a flute of bone
Taken from a heron's thigh,
A heron crazed by the moon,
Were cleverly, softly played.

[Speaking]
Who is this from whom the crowd has shrunk,
As though he had some look that terrified?
He has a deathly face, and yet he moves
Like a young foal that sees the hunt go by
And races in the field.
[A *player* with the *mask of Lazarus has entered.*

Lazarus. — He raised me up.
I am the man that died and was raised up;
I am called Lazarus.

Christ. — Seeing that you died,
Lay in the tomb four days and were raised up,
You will not mock at me.

Lazarus. — For four whole days
I had been dead and I was lying still
In an old comfortable mountain cavern
When you came climbing there with a great crowd
And dragged me to the light.

Christ. — I called your name:
'Lazarus, come out,' I said, and you came out
Bound up in cloths, your face bound in a cloth.

Lazarus. You took my death, give me your death instead.

Christ. I gave you life.

Lazarus. — But death is what I ask.
Alive I never could escape your love,
And when I sickened towards my death I thought,
‘I’ll to the desert, or chuckle in a corner,
Mere ghost, a solitary thing.’ I died
And saw no more until I saw you stand
In the opening of the tomb; ‘Come out!’ you called;
You dragged me to the light as boys drag out
A rabbit when they have dug its hole away;
And now with all the shouting at your heels
You travel towards the death I am denied.
And that is why I have hurried to this road
And claimed your death.

Christ. — But I have conquered death,
And all the dead shall be raised up again.

Lazarus. Then what I heard is true. I thought to die
When my allotted years ran out again;
And that, being gone, you could not hinder it;
But now you will blind with light the solitude
That death has made; you will disturb that corner
Where I had thought I might lie safe for ever.

Christ. I do my Father’s will.

Lazarus. — And not your own;
And I was free four days, four days being dead.
Climb up to Calvary, but turn your eyes
From Lazarus that cannot find a tomb

Although he search all height and depth: make way,
Make way for Lazarus that must go search
Among the desert places where there is nothing
But howling wind and solitary birds. — [He *goes out.*

First Musician. The crowd shrinks backward from the face that seems
Death-stricken and death-hungry still; and now
Martha, and those three Marys, and the rest
That live but in His love are gathered round Him.
He holds His right arm out, and on His arm
Their lips are pressed and their tears fall; and now
They cast them on the ground before His dirty
Blood-dabbled feet and clean them with their hair.

[Sings]
Take but His love away,
Their love becomes a feather
Of eagle, swan or gull,
Or a drowned heron's feather
Tossed hither and thither
Upon the bitter spray
And the moon at the full.

Christ. I felt their hair upon my feet a moment
And then they fled away — why have they fled?
Why has the street grown empty of a sudden
As though all fled in terror?

Judas (who *has just entered]*. I am Judas
That sold you for the thirty pieces of silver.

Christ. You were beside me every day, and saw
The dead raised up and blind men given their sight,
And all that I have said and taught you have known,
Yet doubt that I am God.

Judas. — I have not doubted;
I knew it from the first moment that I saw you;
I had no need of miracles to prove it.

Christ. And yet you have betrayed me.

Judas. — I have betrayed you
Because you seemed all-powerful.

Christ. — My Father
Even now, if I were but to whisper it,
Would break the world in His miraculous fury
To set me free.

Judas. — And is there not one man
In the wide world that is not in your power?

Christ. My Father put all men into my hands.

Judas. That was the very thought that drove me wild.
I could not bear to think you had but to whistle
And I must do; but after that I thought,
‘Whatever man betrays Him will be free’;

And life grew bearable again. And now
Is there a secret left I do not know,
Knowing that if a man betrays a God
He is the stronger of the two?

Christ. — But if
‘Twere the commandment of that God Himself,
That God were still the stronger.

Judas. — When I planned it
There was no live thing near me but a heron
So full of itself that it seemed terrified.

Christ. But my betrayal was decreed that hour
When the foundations of the world were laid-

Judas. It was decreed that somebody betray you —
I’d thought of that — but not that I should do it,
I the man Judas, born on such a day,
In such a village, such and such his parents;
Nor that I’d go with my old coat upon me
To the High Priest, and chuckle to myself
As people chuckle when alone, and do it
For thirty pieces and no more, no less,
And neither with a nod nor a sent message,
But with a kiss upon your cheek. I did it,
I, Judas, and no other man, and now
You cannot even save me.

Christ. — Begone from me.
[Three Roman Soldiers have entered.

First Roman Soldier. He has been chosen to hold up the cross.

[During *what follows, Judas holds up the cross while Christ stands with His arms stretched out upon it.*

Second Roman Soldier. We'll keep the rest away; they are too persistent;
They are always wanting something.

Third Roman *Soldier.* — Die in peace.
There's no one here but Judas and ourselves.

Christ. And who are you that ask your God for nothing?

Third Roman Soldier. We are the gamblers, and when you are dead
We'll settle who is to have that cloak of yours
By throwing dice.

Second Roman Soldier. Our dice were carved
Out of an old sheep's thigh at Ephesus.

First Roman Soldier. Although but one of us can win the cloak
That will not make us quarrel; what does it matter?
One day one loses and the next day wins.

Second Roman Soldier. Whatever happens is the best, we say,
So that it's unexpected.

Third Roman Soldier. Had you sent
A crier through the world you had not found

More comfortable companions for a deathbed
Than three old gamblers that have asked for nothing.

First Roman Soldier. They say you're good and that you made the world,
But it's no matter.

Second Roman Soldier. Come now; let us dance
The dance of the dice-throwers, for it may be
He cannot live much longer and has not seen it.

Third Roman Soldier. If he were but the God of dice he'd know it,
But he is not that God.
First Roman *Soldier.* — One thing is plain,
To know that he has nothing that we need
Must be a comfort to him.

Second Roman Soldier. — In the dance
We quarrel for a while, but settle it
By throwing dice, and after that, being friends,
Join hand to hand and wheel about the cross. [They *dance.*

Christ. My Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me?
[Song *for the folding and unfolding of the cloth]*

First Musician.
Lonely the sea-bird lies at her rest,
Blown like a dawn-blenched parcel of spray
Upon the wind, or follows her prey
Under a great wave's hollowing crest.

Second Musician.

God has not appeared to the birds.

Third Musician.

The ger-eagle has chosen his part
In blue deep of the upper air
Where one-eyed day can meet his stare;
He is content with his savage heart.

Second Musician.

God has not appeared to the birds.

First Musician.

But where have last year's cygnets gone?
The lake is empty; why do they fling
White wing out beside white wing?
What can a swan need but a swan?

Second Musician.

God has not appeared to the birds.

THE END

The Player Queen

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THE PLAYER QUEEN

SCENE I.

An open space at the meeting of three streets. One can see for some way down one of these streets and at some little distance it turns, showing a bare piece of wall lighted by a hanging lamp. Against this lighted wall are silhouetted the heads and shoulders of two old men. They are leaning from the upper windows, one on either side of the street. They wear grotesque masks. A little to one side of the stage is a great stone for mounting a horse from. The houses have knockers.

FIRST OLD MAN. Can you see the Queen's castle? You have better sight than I.

SECOND OLD MAN. I can just see it rising over the tops of the houses yonder on its great rocky hill.

FIRST OLD MAN. IS the dawn breaking?

Is it touching the tower?

SECOND OLD MAN. It is beginning to break upon the tower, but these narrow streets will be dark for a long while. *[A pause.]* Do you hear anything? You have better hearing than I.

FIRST OLD MAN. No, all is quiet.

SECOND OLD MAN. At least fifty passed by an hour since, a crowd of fifty men walking rapidly.

FIRST OLD MAN. Last night was very quiet, not a sound, not a breath.

SECOND OLD MAN. And not a thing to be seen till the tapster's old dog came down the street upon this very hour from Cooper Malachi's ash-pit.

FIRST OLD MAN. Hush, I hear feet, many feet. Perhaps they are coming this way.

[Pause.] No, they are going the other way, they are gone now.

SECOND OLD MAN. The young are at some mischief, — the young and the middle-aged.

FIRST OLD MAN. Why can't they stay in their beds, and they can sleep too — seven hours, eight hours. I mind the time when I could sleep ten hours. They will know the value of sleep when they are near upon ninety years.

SECOND OLD MAN. They will never live so long. They have not the health and strength that we had. They wear themselves out. They are always in a passion about something or other.

FIRST OLD MAN. Hush! I hear a step now, and it is coming this way. We had best pull in our heads. The world has grown very wicked and there is no knowing what they might do to us or say to us.

SECOND OLD MAN. Yes, better shut the windows and pretend to be asleep.

[They pull in their heads. One hears a knocker being struck in the distance, then a pause and a knocker is struck close at hand. Another pause and SEPTIMUS, *a handsome man of thirty-five, staggers on to the stage. He is very drunk.*

SEPTIMUS. An uncharitable place, an unChristian place. *[He begins banging at a knocker*.] Open there, open there. I want to come in and sleep.

[A THIRD OLD MAN *puts his head from an upper window.*

THIRD OLD MAN. Who are you? What do you want?

SEPTIMUS. I am Septimus. I have a bad wife. I want to come in and sleep.

THIRD OLD MAN. YOU are drunk.

SEPTIMUS. Drunk I So would you be if you had as bad a wife.

THIRD OLD MAN. GO away.

[He shuts the window.

SEPTIMUS. Is there not one Christian in this town. *[He begins hammering the knocker of the* FIRST OLD MAN, *but there is no answer.]* No one there? All dead or drunk maybe — bad wives. There must be one Christian man.

[He hammers a knocker at the other side of the stage. An OLD WOMAN *puts her head out of the window above.*

OLD WOMAN *[in a shrill voice].* Who's there? What do you want? Has something happened?

SEPTIMUS. Yes, that's it. Something has happened. My wife has hid herself, has run away, or has drowned herself.

OLD WOMAN. What do I care about your wife! You are drunk.

SEPTIMUS. Not care about my wife! But I tell you that my wife has to play by order of the Prime Minister before all the people in the great hall of the Castle precisely at noon and she cannot be found.

OLD WOMAN. Go away, go away! I tell you, go away. — *[She shuts the window,* SEPTIMUS. Treat Septimus, who has played before Kubla Khan, like this. Septimus, dramatist and poet! *[The* OLD WOMAN *opens the window again and empties a jug of water over him.]* Water! drenched to the skin — must sleep in the street. *[Lies down.]* Bad wife — others have had bad wives, but others were not left to lie down in the open street under the stars, drenched with cold water, a whole jug of cold water, shivering in the pale light of the dawn, to be run over, to be trampled upon, to be eaten by dogs, and all because their wives have hidden themselves.

Enter TWO MEN *a little older than* SEPTIMUS.

They stand still and gaze into the sky.

FIRST MAN. Ah, my friend, the little fairhaired one is a minx.

SECOND MAN. Never trust fair hair — I will have nothing but brown hair.

FIRST MAN. They have kept us too long — brown or fair.

SECOND MAN. What are you staring at?

FIRST MAN. At the first streak of the dawn on the Castle tower.

SECOND MAN. I would not have my wife find out for the world.

SEPTIMUS [*sitting up].* Carry me, support me, drag me, roll me, pull me, or sidle me along, but bring me where I may sleep in comfort. Bring me to a

stable — my Saviour was content with a stable.

FIRST MAN. Who are you? I don't know your face.

SEPTIMUS. I am Septimus, a player, a playwright and the most famous poet in the world.

SECOND MAN. That name, sir, is unknown to me.

SEPTIMUS. Unknown?

SECOND MAN. But my name will not be unknown to you. I am called Peter of the Purple Pelican, after the best known of my poems, and my friend is called Happy Tom. He also is a poet.

SEPTIMUS. Bad, popular poets.

SECOND MAN. You would be a popular poet if you could.

SEPTIMUS. Bad, popular poets.

FIRST MAN. Lie where you are if you can't be civil.

SEPTIMUS. What do I care for any one now except Venus and Adonis and the other planets of heaven?

SECOND MAN. You can enjoy their company by yourself. [*The* TWO MEN *go out.*

SEPTIMUS. Robbed, so to speak; naked, so to speak — bleeding, so to speak — and they pass by on the other side of the street.

[A crowd of CITIZENS *and* COUNTRYMEN *enter. At first only a few, and then more and more till the stage is filled by an excited crowd.*

FIRST CITIZEN. There is a man lying here.

SECOND CITIZEN. Roll him over.

FIRST CITIZEN. He is one of those players who are housed at the Castle. They arrived yesterday.

SECOND CITIZEN. Drunk, I suppose. He'll be killed or maimed by the first milk-cart.

THIRD CITIZEN. Better roll him into the corner. If we are in for a bloody day's business, there is no need for him to be killed — an unnecessary death might bring a curse upon us.

FIRST CITIZEN. Give me a hand here.

[They begin rolling SEPTIMUS.

SEPTIMUS [*muttering*]. Not allowed to sleep! Rolled off the street! Shoved into a stony place! Unchristian town!

[He is left lying at the foot of the wall to one side of the stage.

THIRD CITIZEN. Are we all friends here, are we all agreed?

FIRST CITIZEN. These men are from the country. They came in last night. They know little of the business. They won't be against the people, but they want to know more.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Yes, that is it. We are with the people, but we want to know more.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. We want to know all, but we are with the people.

[Other voices take up the words, 'We want to know all, but we are with the people,' etc. *There is a murmur of voices together.*

THIRD CITIZEN. Have you ever seen the Queen, countryman?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. NO.

THIRD CITIZEN. Our Queen is a witch, a bad evil-living witch, and we will have her no longer for Queen.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. I would be slow to believe her father's daughter a witch.

THIRD CITIZEN. Have you ever seen the Queen, countryman?

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. No.

THIRD CITIZEN. Nor has any one else. Not a man here has set eyes on her. For seven years she has been shut up in that great black house on the great rocky hill. From the day her father died she has been there with the doors shut on her, but we know now why she has hidden herself. She has no good companions in the dark night.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. In my district they say that she is a holy woman and prays for us all.

THIRD CITIZEN. That story has been spread about by the Prime Minister. He has spies everywhere spreading stories. He is a crafty man.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. It is true, they always deceive us country people. We are not educated like the people of the town.

A BIG COUNTRYMAN. The Bible says, Suffer not a witch to live. Last Candlemas twelvemonth I strangled a witch with my own hands.

THIRD CITIZEN. When she is dead we will make the Prime Minister King.

SECOND CITIZEN. NO, no, he is not a king's son.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I'd send a bellman through the world. There are many kings in Arabia, they say.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. The people must be talking. If you and I were to hide ourselves, or to be someway hard to understand, maybe they would put some bad name on us. I am not against the people, but I want testimony.

THIRD CITIZEN. Come, Tapster, stand up there on the stone and tell what you know.

[The TAPSTER *climbs up on the mounting-stone.*

TAPSTER. I live in the quarter where her Castle is. The garden of my house and the gardens of all the houses in my row run right" p to the rocky hill that has her Castle on the top. There is a lad in my quarter that has a goat in his garden.

FIRST CITIZEN. That's strolling Michael — I know him.

TAPSTER. That goat is always going astray. Strolling Michael got out of his bed early one morning to go snaring birds, and nowhere could he see that goat. So he began climbing up the rock, and up and up he went, till he was close under the wall, and there he found the goat and it shaking and sweating as though something had scared it. Presently he heard a thing neigh like a horse, and after that a something like a white horse ran by, but it was no horse, but a unicorn. He had his pistol, for he had thought to bring down a rabbit, and seeing it rushing at him as he imagined, he fired at the unicorn. It vanished all in a moment, but there was blood on a great stone.

THIRD CITIZEN. Seeing what company she keeps in the small hours, what wonder that she never sets foot out of doors.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. I wouldn't believe all that night rambler says — boys are liars. All that we have against her for certain is that she won't put her foot out of doors. I knew a man once that when he was five and twenty refused to get out of his bed. He wasn't ill — no, not he, but he said life was a vale of tears, and for forty and four years till they carried him out to the churchyard he never left that bed. All tried him — parson tried him, priest tried him, doctor tried him, and all he'd say was, 'Life is a vale of tears.' It's too snug he was in his bed, and believe me, that ever since she has had no father to rout her out of a morning she has been in her bed, and small blame to her maybe.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. But that's the very sort that are witches. They know where to find their own friends in the lonely hours of the night. There was a witch in my own district that I strangled last Candlemas twelvemonth. She had an imp in the shape of a red cat, that sucked three drops of blood from her poll every night a little before the cock crew. It's

with their blood they feed them; until they have been fed with the blood they are images and shadows; but when they have it drunk they can be for a while stronger than you or me.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. The man I knew was no witch, he was no way active. ‘Life is a vale of tears,’ he said. Parson tried him, doctor tried him, priest tried him — but that was all he’d say.

FIRST CITIZEN. We’d have no man go beyond evidence and reason, but hear the Tapster out, and when you have you’ll say that we cannot leave her alive this day — no, not for one day longer.

TAPSTER. It’s not a story that I like to be telling, but you are all married men. Another night that boy climbed up after his goat and it was an hour earlier by his clock and no light in the sky, and when he came to the Castle wall he clambered along the wall among the rocks and bushes till he saw a light from a little window over his head. It was an old wall full of holes, where mortar had fallen out, and he climbed up, putting his toes into the holes, till he could look in through the window; and when he looked in, what did he see but the Queen.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. And did he say what she was like?

THE TAPSTER. He saw more than that. He saw her coupling with a great white unicorn. — *[Murmurs among the crowd.*

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I will not have the son of the unicorn to reign over us, although you will tell me he would be no more than half a unicorn.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. I’ll not go against the people, but I’d let her live if the Prime Minister promised to rout her out of bed in the morning and to

set a guard to drive off the unicorn.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. I have strangled an old witch with these two hands, and to-day I will strangle a young witch.

SEPTIMUS *[who has slowly got up and climbed up on to the mounting-stone which the* TAPSTER *has left].* Did I hear somebody say that the unicorn is not chaste? It is a most noble beast, a most religious beast. It has a milk-white skin and a milk-white horn, and milk-white hooves, but a mild blue eye, and it dances in the sun. I will have no one speak against it, not while I am still upon the earth. It is written in "The Great Beastery of Paris" that it is chaste, that it is the most chaste of all the beasts in the world.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Pull him out of that, he's drunk.

SEPTIMUS. Yes, I am drunk, I am very drunk, but that is no reason why I should permit any one to speak against the unicorn.

SECOND CITIZEN. Let's hear him out. We can do nothing till the sun's up.

SEPTIMUS. Nobody shall speak against the unicorn. No, my friends and poets, nobody.

I will hunt it if you will, though it is a dangerous and cross-grained beast. Much virtue has made it cross-grained. I will go with you to the high tablelands of Africa where it lives, and we will there shoot it through the head, but I will not speak against its character, and if any man declares it is not chaste I will fight him, for I affirm that its chastity is equal to its beauty.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. He is most monstrously drunk.

SEPTIMUS. No longer drunk but inspired.

SECOND CITIZEN. GO on, go on, we'll never hear the like again.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Come away. I've enough of this — we have work to do.

SEPTIMUS. Go away, did- you say, and my breast feathers thrust out and my white wings buoyed up with divinity? Ah! but I can see it now — you are bent upon going to some lonely place where uninterrupted you can speak against the character of the unicorn, but you shall not, I tell you that you shall not.

[He comes down off the stone and squares up at the crowd which tries to pass him.] In the midst of this uncharitable town I will protect that noble, milk-white, flighty beast.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Let me pass.

SEPTIMUS. No, I will not let you pass.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Leave him alone.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. No violence — it might bring ill-luck upon us.

[They try to hold back the BIG COUNTRYMAN, SEPTIMUS. I will oppose your passing to the death. For I will not have it said that there is a smirch, or a blot, upon the most milky whiteness of an heroic brute that bathes by the sound of tabors at the rising of the sun and the rising of the moon, and the rising of the Great Bear, and above all, it shall not be said, whispered, or in any wise published abroad by you that stand there, so to

speak, between two washings; for you were doubtless washed when you were born, and, it may be, shall be washed again after you are dead.

[The BIG COUNTRYMAN *knocks him down.*

FIRST CITIZEN. You have killed him.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Maybe I have, maybe I have not — let him lie there. A witch I strangled last Candlemas twelvemonth, a witch I will strangle to-day. What do I care for the likes of him?

THIRD CITIZEN. Come round to the east quarter of the town. The basket-makers and the sieve-makers will be out by this.

FOURTH CITIZEN. It is a short march from there to the Castle gate.

[They go up one of the side streets, but return quickly in confusion and fear.

FIRST CITIZEN. Are you sure that you saw him?

SECOND CITIZEN. Who could mistake that horrible old man?

THIRD CITIZEN. I was standing by him when the ghost spoke out of him seven years ago.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. I never saw him before. He has never been in my district.

I don’t rightly know what sort he is, but I have heard of him, many a time I have heard of him.

FIRST CITIZEN. His eyes become glassy, and that is the trance growing upon him, and when he is in the trance his soul slips away and a ghost takes its place and speaks out of him — a strange ghost.

THIRD CITIZEN. I was standing by him the last time. ‘Get me straw,’ said that old man, ‘my back itches.’ Then all of a sudden he lay down, with his eyes wide open and glassy, and he brayed like a donkey. At that moment the King died and the King’s daughter was Queen.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. They say it is the donkey that carried Christ into Jerusalem and that is why it knows its rightful sovereign.

He goes begging about the country and there is no man dare refuse him what he asks.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Then it is certain nobody will take my hand off her throat. I will make my grip tighter. He will be lying down on the straw and he will bray, and when he brays she will be dead.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Look! There he is coming over the top of the hill, and the mad look upon him.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I wouldn’t face him for the world this night. Come round to the market-place, we’ll be less afraid in a big place.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. I’m not afraid, but I’ll go with you till I get my hand on her throat.

[They all go out but SEPTIMUS. *Presently* SEPTIMUS *sits up; his head is bleeding. He rubs with his fingers his broken head and looks at the blood on his fingers.*

SEPTIMUS. Unchristian town! First I am, so to speak, thrown out into the street, and then I am all but murdered; and I drunk, and therefore in need of protection. All creatures are in need of protection at some time or other. Even my wife was once a frail child in need of milk, of smiles, of love, as if in the midst of a flood, in danger of drowning, so to speak.

[An OLD BEGGAR *with long matted hair and beard and in ragged clothes comes in.*

THE OLD BEGGAR. I want straw.

SEPTIMUS. Happy Tom and Peter of the Purple Pelican have done it all. They are bad, popular poets, and being jealous of my fame, they have stirred up the people.

[He catches sight of the OLD BEGGAR.] There is a certain medicine which is made by distilling camphor, peruvian bark, spurge and mandrake, and mixing all with twelve ounces of dissolved pearls and four ounces of the oil of gold; and this medicine is infallible to stop the flow of blood. Have you any of it, old man?

THE OLD BEGGAR. I want straw.

SEPTIMUS. I can see that you have not got it, but no matter, we shall be friends.

THE OLD BEGGAR. I want straw to lie down on.

SEPTIMUS. It is no doubt better that I should bleed to death. For that way, my friend, I shall disgrace Happy Tom and Peter of the Purple Pelican, but

it is necessary that I shall die somewhere where my last words can be taken down. I am therefore in need of your support.

[Having got up he now staggers over to the OLD MAN *and leans upon him.*

THE OLD BEGGAR. Don't you know who I am — aren't you afraid? When something comes inside me, my back itches. Then I must lie down and roll, and then I bray and the crown changes.

SEPTIMUS. Ah! you are inspired. Then we are indeed brothers. Come, I will rest upon your shoulder and we will mount the hill side by side. I will sleep in the Castle of the Queen.

THE OLD BEGGAR. You will give me straw to lie upon?

SEPTIMUS. Asphodels! Yet, indeed, the asphodel is a flower much overrated by the classic authors. Still, if a man has a preference, I say for the asphodel —

[They go out and one hears the voice of SEPTIMUS *murmuring in the distance about asphodels.*

[The FIRST OLD MAN *opens his window and taps with his crutch at the opposite window. The* SECOND OLD MAN *opens his window.*

FIRST OLD MAN. It is all right now. They are all gone. We can have our talk out.

SECOND OLD MAN. The whole Castle is lit by the dawn now, and it will soon begin to grow brighter in the street.

FIRST OLD MAN. It’s time for the Tapster’s old dog to come down the street.

SECOND OLD MAN. Yesterday he had a bone in his mouth.

CURTAIN

SCENE II.

The throne-room in the Castle. Between pillars are gilded openwork doors, except at one side, where there is a large window. The morning light is slanting through the window, making dark shadows among the pillars. As the scene goes on, the light, at first feeble, becomes strong and suffused and the shadows disappear. Through the openwork doors one can see down long passages, and one of these passages plainly leads into the open air. — see daylight at the end of it. There is a throne in the centre of the room and a flight of steps that leads to it.

The PRIME MINISTER, *an elderly man with an impatient manner and voice, is talking to a group of players, among whom is Nona, a fair, comely, comfortable-looking young woman of perhaps thirty-five; she seems to take the lead.*

PRIME MINISTER. I will not be trifled with. I chose the play myself; I chose "The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge." because when Noah beats his wife to make her go into the Ark everybody understands, everybody is pleased, everybody recognises the mulish obstinacy of their own wives, sweethearts, sisters. And now, when it is of the greatest importance to the State that everybody should be pleased, the play cannot be given. The leading lady is lost, you say, and there is some unintelligible reason why nobody can take her place; but I know what you are all driving at — you object to the play I have chosen. You want some dull, poetical thing, full of long speeches. I will have that play and no other. The rehearsal must begin at once and the performance take place at noon punctually.

NONA. We have searched all night, sir, and we cannot find her anywhere. She was heard to say that she would drown rather than play a woman older

than thirty. Seeing that Noah's wife is a very old woman, we are afraid that she has drowned herself indeed.

[DECIMA, *a very pretty woman, puts her head out from under the throne where she has been lying hidden.*

PRIME MINISTER. Nonsense! It is all a conspiracy. Your manager should be here. He is responsible. You can tell him when he does come that if the play is not performed, I will clap him into jail for a year and pitch the rest of you over the border.

NONA. Oh, sir, he couldn't help it. She does whatever she likes.

PRIME MINISTER. Does whatever she likes — I know her sort; would pull the world to pieces to spite her husband or her lover. I know her — a bladder full of dried peas for a brain, a brazen, bragging baggage. Of course he couldn't help it, but what do I care.

[DECIMA -*pulls in her head*.] To jail he goes — somebody has got to go to jail. Go and cry her name everywhere. Away with you! Let me hear you cry it out. Call the baggage. Louder. Louder. [*The players go out crying,* 'Where are you, Decima?']

Oh, Adam! why did you fall asleep in the garden? You might have known that while you were lying there helpless, the Old Man in the Sky would play some prank upon you.

[The QUEEN, *who is young, with an ascetic timid face, enters in a badly fitting state dress.*

Ah!

QUEEN. I will show myself to the angry people as you have bidden me. I am almost certain that I am ready for martyrdom. I have prayed all night. Yes, I am almost certain.

PRIME MINISTER. Ah!

QUEEN. I have now attained to the age of my patroness, Holy Saint Octema, when she was martyred at Antioch. You will remember that her unicorn was so pleased at the spectacle of her austerity that he caracoled in his excitement. Thereupon she dropped out of the saddle and was trampled to death under the feet of the mob. Indeed, but for the unicorn, the mob would have killed her long before.

PRIME MINISTER. No, you will not be martyred. I have a plan to settle that. I will stop their anger with a word. Who made that dress?

QUEEN. It was my mother's dress. She wore it at her coronation. I would not have a new one made. I do not deserve new clothes. I am always committing sin.

PRIME MINISTER. IS there sin in an egg that has never been hatched, that has never been warmed, in a chalk egg?

QUEEN. I wish I could resemble Holy Saint Octema in everything.

PRIME MINISTER. What a dress! It is too late now. Nothing can be done. It may appear right to those on the edge of the crowd. The others must be conquered by charm, dignity, royal manner. As for the dress, I must think of some excuse, some explanation. Remember that they have never seen your face, and you will put them in a bad humour if you hang your head in that dumbfounded way.

QUEEN. I wish I could return to my prayers.

PRIME MINISTER. Walk! Permit me to see your Majesty walk. No, no, no. Be more majestic. Ah! If you had known the Queens I have known — they had a way with them. Morals of a dragoon, but a way, a way. Give the people some plain image or they will invent one. Put on a kind of eagle look, a vulture look.

QUEEN. There are cobble-stones — if I might go barefoot it would be a blessed penance. It was especially the bleeding feet of Saint Octema that gave pleasure to the unicorn.

PRIME MINISTER. Sleep of Adam! Barefoot — barefoot, did you say? [*A pause.]*

There is not time to take off your shoes and stockings. If you were to look out of the window there, you would see the crowd becoming wickeder every minute. Come!

[He gives his arm to the QUEEN.]

QUEEN. You have a plan to stop their anger so that I shall not be martyred?

PRIME MINISTER. My plan will be disclosed before the face of the people and there alone. — *[They go out.*

[NONA *comes in with a bottle of wine and a boiled lobster and lays them on the middle of the floor. She puts her finger on her lip and stands in the doorway towards the back of the stage.*

DECIMA *[comes cautiously out of her hiding place singing].*

‘He went away,’ my mother sang,
‘When I was brought to bed.’

And all the while her needle pulled
The gold and silver thread.

She pulled the thread and bit the thread
And made a golden gown,
She wept because she had dreamt that I
Was born to wear a crown.

[She is just reaching her hand for the lobster when NONA *comes forward holding out towards her the dress and mask of Noah’s wife which she had been carrying over her left arm.*

NONA. Thank God you are found! *[Getting between her and the lobster*.] No, not” ntil you have put on this dress and mask. I have caught you now and you are not going to hide again.

DECIMA. Very well, when I have had my breakfast.

NONA. Not a mouthful till you are dressed ready for the rehearsal.

DECIMA. Do you know what song I was singing just now?

NONA. It is that song you’re always singing. Septimus made it up.

DECIMA. It is the song of the mad singing daughter of a harlot. The only song she had. Her father was a drunken sailor waiting for the full tide, and yet she thought her mother had foretold that she would marry a prince and become a great queen. *[Singing*

‘When she was got,’ my mother sang,
‘I heard a seamew cry, I saw a flake of yellow foam
That dropped upon my thigh.’

How therefore could she help but braid
The gold upon my hair,
And dream that I should carry
The golden top of care.

The moment ago as I lay here I thought I could play a Queen’s part, a great Queen’s part; the only part in the world I can play is a great Queen’s part.

NONA. You play a Queen’s part? You that were born in a ditch between two towns and wrapped in a sheet that was stolen from a hedge.

DECIMA. The Queen cannot play at all, but I could play so well. I could bow with my whole body down to my ankles and could be stern when hard looks were in season. Oh, I would know how to put all summer in a look and after that all winter in a voice.

NONA. Low comedy is what you are fit for.

DECIMA. I understood all this in a wink of the eye, and then just when I am saying to myself that I was born to sit up there with soldiers and courtiers, you come shaking in front of me that mask and that dress. I am not to eat my breakfast unless I play an old peaky-chinned, drop-nosed harridan that a foul husband beats with a stick because she won’t clamber among the other brutes into his cattle boat. [*She makes a dart at the lobster.]*

NONA. No, no, not a drop, not a mouthful till you have put these on. Remember that if there is no play Septimus must go to prison.

DECIMA. Would they give him dry bread to eat?

NONA. They would.

DECIMA. And water to drink and nothing in the water?

NONA. They would.

DECIMA. And a straw bed?

NONA. They would, and only a little straw maybe.

DECIMA. And iron chains that clanked.

NONA. They would.

DECIMA. And keep him there for a whole week?

NONA. A month maybe.

DECIMA. And he would say to the turnkey, ‘I am here because of my beautiful cruel wife, my beautiful flighty wife.’

NONA. He might not, he’d be sober.

DECIMA. But he’d think it and every time he was hungry, every time he was thirsty, every time he felt the hardness of the stone floor, every time he heard the chains clank, he would think it, and every time he thought it I would become more beautiful in his eyes, NONA. No, he would hate you.

DECIMA. Little do you know what the love of man is. If that Holy Image of the Church where you put all those candles at Easter was pleasant and affable, why did you come home with the skin worn off your two knees?

NONA *[in tears],* I understand — you cruel, bad woman — you won't play the part at all, and all that Septimus may go to prison, and he a great genius that can't take care of himself.

[Seeing NONA *distracted with tears* DECIMA *makes a dart and almost gets the lobster.*

NONA. No, no! Not a mouthful, not a drop. I will break the bottle if you go near it. There is not another woman in the world would treat a man like that and you were sworn to him in Church — yes, you were, there is no good denying it. [DECIMA *makes another dart, but* NONA, *who is still in tears, puts the lobster in her pocket.]* Leave the food alone; not one mouthful will you get. I have never sworn to a man in Church, but if I did swear I would not treat him like a tinker's donkey — before God I would not — I was properly brought up; my mother always told me it was no light thing to take a man in Church.

DECIMA. You are in love with my husband.

NONA. Because I don't want to see him jailed you say I am in love with him. Only a woman with no heart would think one can't be sorry for a man without being in love with him. A woman who has never been sorry for anybody, but I won't have him jailed, if you won't play the part I'll play it myself.

DECIMA. When I married him, I made him swear never to play with anybody but me, and well you know it.

NONA. Only this once and in a part nobody can do anything with.

DECIMA. That is the way it begins and all the time you would be saying things the audience couldn't hear.

NONA. Septimus will break his oath and I have learnt the part. Every line of it.

DECIMA. Septimus would not break his oath for anybody in the world.

NONA. There is one person in the world for whom he will break his oath.

DECIMA. What have you in your head now?

NONA. He will break it for me.

DECIMA. You are crazy.

NONA. Maybe I have my secrets.

DECIMA. What are you keeping back?

Have you been sitting in corners with Septimus? giving him sympathy because of the bad wife he has and all the while he has sat there to have the pleasure of talking about me?

NONA. You think that you have his every thought because you are a devil.

DECIMA. Because I am a devil I have his every thought. You know how his own song runs. The man speaks first — [*singing.*

Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes,
and then the woman answers —

Oh no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise
And yet not cold.

NONA. His every thought — that is a lie. He forgets all about you the moment you're out of his sight.

DECIMA. Then look what I carry under my bodice. This is a poem praising me, all my beauties one after the other — eyes, hair, complexion, shape, disposition, mind — everything. And there are a great many verses to it. And here is a little one he gave me yesterday morning. I had turned him out of bed and he had to lie alone by himself.

NONA. Alone by himself!

DECIMA. And as he lay there alone, unable to sleep, he made it up, wishing that he were blind so as not to be troubled by looking at my beauty. Hear how it goes! *[sings again.]*

O would that I were an old beggar
Without a friend on this earth
But a thieving rascally cur,
A beggar blind from his birth;
Or anything else but a man
Lying alone on a bed

Remembering a woman's beauty,
Alone with a crazy head.

NONA. Alone in his bed indeed. I know that long poem, that one with all the verses; I know it to my hurt, though I haven't read a word of it. Four lines in every verse, four beats in every line, and fourteen verses — my curse upon it!

DECIMA [*taking out a manuscript from her bodice*]. Yes, fourteen verses. There are numbers to them.

NONA. You have another there — ten verses all in fours and threes.

DECIMA [*looking at another manuscript].* Yes, the verses are in fours and threes. But how do you know all this? I carry them here. They are a secret between him and me, and nobody can see them till they have lain a long while upon my heart.

NONA. They have lain upon your heart, but they were made upon my shoulder. Ay, and down along my spine in the small hours of the morning; so many beats a line, and for every beat a tap of the fingers.

DECIMA. My God!

NONA. That one with the fourteen verses kept me from my sleep two hours, and when the lines were finished he lay upon his back another hour waving one arm in the air, making up the music. I liked him well enough to seem to be asleep through it all, and many another poem too — but when he made up that short one you sang he was so pleased that he muttered the words all about his lying alone in his bed thinking of you, and that made me mad. So I said to him, 'Am I not beautiful? Turn round and look.' Oh, I cut

it short, for even I can please a man when there is but one candle. *[She takes a pair of scissors that are hanging round her neck and begins snipping at the dress for Noah's wife.]* And now you know why I can play the part in spite of you and not be driven out. Work upon Septimus if you have a mind for it. Little need I care. I will clip this a trifle and re-stitch it again — I have a needle and thread ready.

[The STAGE MANAGER *comes in ringing a bell. He is followed by various players all dressed up in likeness of various beasts.*

STAGE MANAGER. Put on that mask — get into your clothes. Why are you standing there as if in a trance?

NONA. Decima and I have talked the matter over and we have settled that I am to play the part.

STAGE MANAGER. Do as you please. Thank God it's a part that anybody can play. All you have got to do is to copy an old woman's squeaky voice. We are all here now but Septimus, and we cannot wait for him. I will read the part of Noah. He will be here before we are finished I daresay. We will suppose that the audience is upon this side, and that the Ark is over there with a gangway for the beasts to climb. All you beasts are to crowd up on the prompt side. Lay down Noah's hat and cloak there till Septimus comes. As the first scene is between Noah and the beasts, you can go on with your sewing.

DECIMA. No, I must first be heard. My husband has been spending his nights with Nona, and that is why she sits clipping and stitching with that vainglorious air.

NONA. She made him miserable, she knows every trick of breaking a man's heart — he came to me with his troubles — I seemed to be a comfort to him, and now — why should I deny it? — he is my lover.

DECIMA. I will take the vainglory out of her. I have been a plague to him. Oh, I have been a badger and a weasel and a hedgehog and pole-cat, and all because I was dead sick of him. And, thank God! she has got him and I am free. I threw away a part and I threw away a man — she has picked both up.

STAGE MANAGER. It seems to me that it all concerns you two. It's your business and not ours. I don't see why we should delay the rehearsal.

DECIMA. I will have no rehearsal yet. I'm too happy now that I am free. I must find somebody who will dance with me for a while. Come we must have music. *[She picks up a lute which has been laid down amongst some properties.* You can't all be claws and hoofs.

STAGE MANAGER. We've only an hour and the whole play to go through.

NONA. Oh, she has taken my scissors, she is only pretending not to care. Look at her! She is mad! Take them away from her! Hold her hand! She is going to kill me or to kill herself. [*To* STAGE MANAGER.] Why don't you interfere? My God! She is going to kill me.

DECIMA. Here, Peter. Play the lute.

[She begins cutting through the breast feathers of the Swan.

NONA. She is doing it all to stop the rehearsal, out of vengeance; and you stand there and do nothing.

STAGE MANAGER. If you have taken her husband, why didn't you keep the news till the play was over? She is going to make them all mad now. I can see that much in her eyes.

DECIMA. NOW that I have thrown Septimus into her lap, I will choose a new man. Shall it be you, Turkey-cock? or you, Bullhead?

STAGE MANAGER. There is nothing to be done. It is all your fault. If Septimus can't manage his wife, it's certain that I can't.

[He sits down helplessly.

FIRST PLAYER *[who is in the jour legs of the Bull].* Come live with me and be my love.

DECIMA. Dance, Bullhead, dance. [*The Bull dances*.] You're too slow on your feet.

FIRST PLAYER. Although I am slow I am twice as good as any other, for I am double — one in the forelegs and one behind.

DECIMA. You are heavy of build and that means jealousy, and there is a sort of melancholy in your voice; and what a folly, now that I have found out love, to stretch and yawn as if I loved.

SECOND PLAYER *[who is in the form of a Turkey-cock*]. Come live with me and be my love, for as everybody can see from my ruff and my red wattle and my way of strutting and my chuckling speech, I have a cheerful appetite.

DECIMA. Dance, dance. *[The Turkey-cock dances*.] Ah, Turkey-cock, you are lively on your feet and I would find it hard to hide if you followed. Would you expect me to be faithful?

SECOND PLAYER. No, neither I nor you. I have a score of wives.

NONA. You are a disgrace.

SECOND PLAYER. Be content now that you have a man of your own.

DECIMA. You are quick of mind, Turkeycock. I see that by your bright eyes, but I want to let my mind go asleep. All dance, all, all, and I will choose the best dancer amongst you.

FIRST PLAYER. No, let us toss for it. I understand that better.

DECIMA. Quick, quick, begin to dance.

[All dance round DECIMA.

DECIMA *[singing].*

Shall I fancy beast or fowl,
Queen Pasiphae chose a bull,
While a passion for a swan
Made Queen Leda stretch and yawn,
Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

Chorus.
Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

DECIMA.

Spring and straddle, stride and strut,

Shall I choose a bird or brute?

Name the feather or the fur

For my single comforter?

Chorus.
Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

DECIMA. None has found, that found out love,
Single bird or brute enough;
Any bird or brute may rest
An empty head upon my breast.

Chorus.

Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

STAGE MANAGER. Stop, stop, here is Septimus.

SEPTIMUS *[the blood still upon his face and but little soberer*]. Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn; but alas, he is chaste, he hesitates, he hesitates.

STAGE MANAGER. This is not a time for making up speeches for your new play.

SEPTIMUS. His unborn children are but images; we merely play with images.

STAGE MANAGER. Let us get on with the rehearsal.

SEPTIMUS. No; let us prepare to die. The mob is climbing up the hill with pitchforks to stick into our vitals and burning wisps to set the roof on fire.

FIRST PLAYER *[who has gone to the window].* My God, it's true. There is a great crowd at the bottom of the hill.

SECOND PLAYER. But why should they attack us?

SEPTIMUS. Because we are the servants of the Unicorn.

THIRD PLAYER *[at window],* My God, they have dung-forks and scythes set on poles and they are coming this way.

[Many players gather round the window.

SEPTIMUS *[who has found the bottle and is drinking*]. Some will die like Cato, some like Cicero, some like Demosthenes, triumphing over death in sonorous eloquence, or, like Petronius Arbiter, will tell witty, scandalous tales; but I will speak, no, I will sing, as if the mob did not exist. I will rail upon the Unicorn for his chastity. I will bid him trample mankind to death and beget a new race. I will even put my railing into rhyme, and all shall run sweetly, sweetly, for, even if they blow up the floor with gunpowder, they are merely the mob.

Upon the round blue eye I rail,
Damnation on the milk-white horn.

A telling sound, a sound to linger in the ear — hale, tale, bale, gale — my God, I am even too sober to find a rhyme. *[He drinks and then picks up a lute*] — a tune that my murderers may remember my last words and croon them to their grandchildren.

[For the next few speeches he is busy making his tune.

FIRST PLAYER. The players of this town are jealous. Have we not been chosen before them all, because we are the most famous players in the world? It is they who have stirred up the mob.

THIRD PLAYER. When we played at Kzanadu, my performance was so incomparable that the men who pulled the strings of the puppet-show left all the puppets lying on their backs and came to have a look at me.

FOURTH PLAYER. Listen to him! His performance indeed! I ask you all to speak the truth. If you are honest men you will say that it was my performance that drew the town. Why, Kubla Khan himself gave me the name of the Talking Nightingale.

FIFTH, PLAYER. My God, listen to him! Is it not always the comedian who draws the people? Am I dreaming, and was it not I who was called six times before the curtain? Answer me that.

SIXTH PLAYER *[at window*]. There is somebody making a speech. I cannot see who it is.

SECOND PLAYER. Depend upon it, he is telling them to put burning wisps upon dungforks and put them into the rafters. That is what they did in the old play of the Burning of Troy. Depend upon it, they will burn the whole house.

FIFTH PLAYER *[coming from window],* I will stay here no longer.

OTHER PLAYERS. Nor I, nor I. *[Exit.*

FIRST PLAYER. Must we go dressed like this?

SECOND PLAYER. There is no time to change, and besides should the hill be surrounded, we can gather in some cleft of the rocks where we can be seen only from a distance. They will suppose we are a drove of cattle or a flock of birds.

[All go out except SEPTIMUS, DECIMA, *and* NONA. NONA *is making a bundle of Noah's hat and cloak and other properties*. DECIMA *is watching* SEPTIMUS.

SEPTIMUS *[while the players are going out].* Leave me to die alone? I do not blame you. There is courage in red wine, in white wine, in beer, even in thin beer sold by a blear-eyed potboy in a bankrupt tavern, but there is none in the human heart. When my master the Unicorn bathes by the light of the Great Bear, and to the sound of tabors, even the sweet river-water makes him drunk; but it is cold, it is cold, alas! it is cold.

NONA. I'll pile these upon your back. I shall carry the rest myself and so we shall save all.

[She begins tying a great bundle of properties on SEPTIMUS' *back.*

SEPTIMUS. You are right. I accept the reproach. It is necessary that we who are the last artists — all the rest have gone over to the mob — shall save the images and implements of our art. We must carry into safety the cloak of Noah, the high-crowned hat of Noah, and the golden face of the Almighty, and the horns of Satan.

NONA. Thank God you can still stand upright on your legs.

SEPTIMUS. Tie all upon my back and I will tell you the great secret that came to me at the second mouthful of the bottle. Man is nothing till he is united to an image. Now the Unicorn is both an image and beast; that is why he alone can be the new Adam. When we have put all in safety we will go to the high tablelands of Africa and find where the Unicorn is stabled and sing a marriage song. I will stand before the terrible blue eye.

NONA. There now I have tied them on.

[She begins making another bundle for herself.

SEPTIMUS. You will make Ionian music — music with its eyes upon that voluptuous Asia — the Dorian scale would but confirm him in his chastity. One Dorian note might undo us, and above all we must be careful not to speak of Delphi. The oracle is chaste.

NONA. Come, let us go.

SEPTIMUS. If we cannot fill him with desire he will deserve death. Even unicorns can be killed. What they dread most in the world is a blow from a knife that has been dipped in the blood of a serpent that died gazing upon an emerald.

[NONA *and* SEPTIMUS *are about to go out*, NONA *leading* SEPTIMUS.

DECIMA. Stand back, do not dare to move a step.

SEPTIMUS. Beautiful as the unicorn but fierce.

DECIMA. I have locked the gates that we may have a talk.

[NONA *lets the hat of Noah fall in her alarm.*

SEPTIMUS. That is well, very well. You would talk with me because to-day I am extraordinarily wise.

DECIMA. I will not unlock the gate till I have a promise that you will drive her from the company.

NONA. Do not listen to her; take the key from her.

SEPTIMUS. If I were not her husband I would take the key, but because I am her husband she is terrible. The Unicorn will be terrible when it loves.

NONA. You are afraid.

SEPTIMUS. Could not you yourself take it? She does not love you, therefore she will not be terrible.

NONA. If you are a man at all you will take it.

SEPTIMUS. I am more than a man, I am extraordinarily wise. I will take the key.

DECIMA. If you come a step nearer I will shove the key through the grating of the door.

NONA *[pulling him back]*. Don't go near her; if she shoves it through the door we shall not be able to escape. The crowd will find us and murder us.

DECIMA. I will unlock this gate when you have taken an oath to drive her from the company, an oath never to speak with her or look at her again, a terrible oath.

SEPTIMUS. You are jealous; it is very wrong to be jealous. An ordinary man would be lost — even I am not yet wise enough.

[Drinks again.] Now all is plain.

DECIMA. You have been unfaithful to me.

SEPTIMUS. I am only unfaithful when I am sober. Never trust a sober man. All the world over they are unfaithful. Never trust a man who has not bathed by the light of the Great Bear. I warn you against all sober men from the bottom of my heart. I am extraordinarily wise.

NONA. Promise, if it is only an oath she wants. Take whatever oath she bids you. If you delay we shall all be murdered.

SEPTIMUS. I can see your meaning. You would explain to me that an oath can be broken, more especially an oath under compulsion, but no, I say to you, no, I say to you, certainly not. Am I a rascally sober man, such a man as I have warned you against? Shall I be foresworn before the very eyes of Delphi, so to speak, before the very eyes of that cold, rocky oracle? What I promise I perform, therefore, my little darling, I will not promise anything at all.

DECIMA. Then we shall wait here. They will come in there and there, they will carry dung-forks with burning wisps. They will put the burning wisps into the roof and we shall be burnt.

SEPTIMUS. I shall die railing upon that beast. The Christian era has come to an end, but because of the machinations of Delphi he will not become the new Adam.

DECIMA. I shall be avenged. She starved me, but I shall have killed her.

NONA [*who has crept behind* DECIMA *and snatched the key],* I have it, I have it I [DECIMA *tries to take the key again but* SEPTIMUS *holds her.*

SEPTIMUS. Because I am an unforesworn man I am strong: a violent virginal creature, that is how it is put in "The Great Beastery of Paris."

DECIMA. Go, then. I shall stay here and die.

NONA. Let us go. A half hour since she offered herself to every man in the company.

DECIMA. If you would be faithful to me, Septimus, I would not let a man of them touch me.

SEPTIMUS. Flighty, but beautiful.

NONA. She is a bad woman.

[NONA *runs out.*

SEPTIMUS. A beautiful, bad, flighty woman I will follow, but follow slowly. I will take with me this noble hat. *[He picks up Noah's hat with*

difficulty.] I will save the noble, high-crowned hat of Noah. I will carry it thus with dignity. I will go slowly that they may see I am not afraid. — *[singing.*

Upon the round blue eye I rail
Damnation on the milk-white horn.
But not one word of Delphi.
I am extraordinarily wise. — *[He goes.*

DECIMA. Betrayed, betrayed, and for a nobody. For a woman that a man can shake and twist like so much tallow. A woman that till now never looked higher than a prompter or a property man. *[The* OLD BEGGAR *comes in.]* Have you come to kill me, old man?

OLD BEGGAR. I am looking for straw. I must soon lie down and roll, and where will I get straw to roll on? I went round to the kitchen and 'Go away' they said. They made the sign of the cross as if it were a devil that puts me rolling.

DECIMA. When will the mob come to kill me?

OLD BEGGAR. Kill you? It is not you they are going to kill. It's the itching in my back that drags them hither, for when I bray like a donkey, the crown changes.

DECIMA. The crown? So it is the Queen they are going to kill.

OLD BEGGAR. But, my dear, she can't die till I roll and bray, and I will whisper to you what it is that rolls. It is the donkey that carried Christ into Jerusalem, and that is why he is so proud; and that is why he knows the hour when there is to be a new King or a new Queen.

DECIMA. Are you weary of the world, old man?

OLD BEGGAR. Yes, yes, because when I roll and bray I am asleep. I know nothing about it, and that is a great pity. I remember nothing but the itching in my back. But I must stop talking and find some straw.

DECIMA [*picking up the scissors*]. Old man, I am going to drive this into my heart.

OLD BEGGAR. NO, no; don't do that. You don't know what you will be put to when you are dead, into whose gullet you will be put to sing or to bray. You have a look of a foretelling sort. Who knows but you might be put to foretell the death of kings; and bear in mind I will have no rivals, I could not endure a rival.

DECIMA. I have been betrayed by a man, I have been made a mockery of. Do those who are dead, old man, make love and do they find good lovers?

OLD BEGGAR. I will whisper you another secret. People talk, but I have never known of anything to come from there but an old jackass. Maybe there is nothing else. Who knows but he has the whole place to himself. But there, my back is beginning to itch, and I have not yet found any straw.

[He goes out. DECIMA *leans the scissors upon the arm of the throne and is about to press herself upon them when the* QUEEN *enters.*

QUEEN *[stopping her].* No, no, — that would be a great sin.

DECIMA. Your Majesty!

QUEEN. I thought I would like to die a martyr, but that would be different, that would be to die for God's glory. The Holy Saint Octema was a martyr.

DECIMA. I am very unhappy.

QUEEN. I, too, am very unhappy. When I saw the great angry crowd and knew that they wished to kill me, though I had wanted to be a martyr, I was afraid and ran away.

DECIMA. I would not have run away. Oh no, but it is hard to drive a knife into one's own flesh.

QUEEN. In a moment they will have come and they will beat in the door, and how shall I escape them?

DECIMA. If they could mistake me for you, you would escape.

QUEEN. I could not let another die instead of me. That would be very wrong.

DECIMA. Oh, your Majesty, I shall die whatever you do, and if only I could wear that gold brocade and those gold slippers for one moment, it would not be so hard to die.

QUEEN. They say that those who die to save a rightful sovereign show great virtue.

DECIMA. Quick! the dress.

QUEEN. If you killed yourself your soul would be lost, and now you will be sure of heaven.

DECIMA. Quick, I hear them coming.

[DECIMA *puts on the* QUEEN'S *robe of state and her slippers. Underneath her robe of state the* QUEEN *wears some kind of nun-like dress. The following speech is spoken by the* QUEEN *while she is helping* DECIMA *to fasten the dress and the slippers.*

QUEEN. Was it love? [DECIMA *nods.]* Oh, that is a great sin. I have never known love. Of all things, that is what I have had most fear of. Saint Octema shut herself up in a tower on a mountain because she was loved by a beautiful prince. I was afraid it would come in at the eye and seize upon me in a moment. I am not naturally good, and they say people will do anything for love, there is so much sweetness in it. Even Saint Octema was afraid of it. But you will escape all that and go up to God as a pure virgin. [*The change is now complete*.] Goodbye, I know how I can slip away. There is a convent that will take me in. It is not a tower, it is only a convent, but I have long wanted to go there to lose my name and disappear. Sit down upon the throne and turn your face away. If you do not turn your face away, you will be afraid. [*The* QUEEN *goes out.*

[DECIMA *is seated upon the throne. A great crowd gathers outside the gates.*

A BISHOP *enters.*

BISHOP. Your loyal people, your Majesty, offer you their homage. I bow before you in their name. Your royal will has spoken by the mouth of the Prime Minister — has filled them with gratitude. All misunderstandings are at an end, all has been settled by your condescension in bestowing your royal hand upon the Prime Minister. *[To crowd]* Her Majesty, who has

hitherto shut herself away from all men's eyes that she might pray for this kingdom undisturbed, will henceforth show herself to her people.

[To PLAYER QUEEN.] So beautiful a queen need never fear the disobedience of her people *[shouts from crowd of 'never']*

PRIME MINISTER *[entering hurriedly*]. I will explain all, your Majesty — there was nothing else to be done — This Bishop has been summoned to unite us *[seeing the* QUEEN]; but, sleep of Adam! — this — who is this?

DECIMA. Your emotion is too great for words. Do not try to speak.

PRIME MINISTER. This — this!

DECIMA *[standing up],* I am queen. I know what it is to be queen. If I were to say to you I had an enemy you would kill him — you would tear him in pieces. *[Shouts 'we would kill him', 'we would tear him in pieces' etc.]* But I do not bid you kill any one — I bid you obey my husband when I have raised him to the throne. He is not of royal blood, but I choose to raise him to the throne. That is my will. Show me that you will obey him so long as I bid you to obey. — *[Great cheering,* [SEPTIMUS, *who has been standing among the crowd, comes forward and takes the* PRIME MINISTER *by the sleeve. Various persons kiss the hand of the supposed* QUEEN, SEPTIMUS. My Lord, that is not the queen; that is my bad wife. [DECIMA *looks at them.*

PRIME MINISTER. Did you see that? Did you see the devil in her eye. They are mad after her pretty face, and she knows it. They would not believe a word I say; there is nothing to be done till they cool.

DECIMA. Are all here my faithful servants?

BISHOP. All, your Majesty.

DECIMA. All?

PRIME MINISTER *[bowing low].* All, your Majesty.

DECIMA *[singing].*

She pulled the thread, and bit the thread
And made a golden gown.

Hand me that plate of lobster and that bottle of wine. While I am eating I will have a good look at my new man.

[The -plate and bottle of wine are handed to her. The bray of a donkey is heard and the OLD BEGGAR *is dragged in.*

BISHOP. At last we have found this impostor out. He has been accepted by the whole nation as if he were the Voice of God. As if the crown could not be settled firmly on any head without his help. *[Shouts from the mob of 'impostor', 'rogue' etc.].* It's plain that he has been in league with the conspirators, and believed that your Majesty had been killed. He is keeping it up still. Look at his glassy eye. But his madman airs won't help him now.

PRIME MINISTER *[shaking* SEPTIMUS]. Do you understand that there has been a miracle, that God or the Fiend has spoken, and that the crown is on her head for good, that fate has brayed on that man's lips. *[Aloud.]* We will hang him in the morning.

SEPTIMUS. She is my wife.

PRIME MINISTER. The crown has changed and there is no help for it. Sleep of Adam, I must have that woman for wife. The Oracle has settled that.

[Take him away to prison.

SEPTIMUS. She is my wife, she is my bad, flighty wife.

PRIME MINISTER. Seize this man. He has been whispering slanders against her Majesty. Cast him beyond the borders of the kingdom and find the company of players he belongs to. They also are banished and must not return on pain of death. Now, my Lord Bishop, I am ready.

DECIMA *[singing].*

She wept because she had dreamt that I
Was born to wear a crown.

[She flings the lobster's claw at the PRIME MINISTER.

Come — crack that claw.

King Oedipus

Based on Sophocles' Play

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Oedipus, *King of Thebes*
Tiresias, *a seer*
Jocasta, *wife of Oedipus* —
A Priest
Antigone, *daughter of Oedipus* —
Messengers
Ismene, *daughter of Oedipus*
A Herdsman
Creon, *brother-in-law of Oedipus*
Chorus

KING OEDIPUS

Scene: Outside the Palace of King Oedipus

OEDIPUS. Children, descendants of old Cadmus, why do you come before me, why do you carry the branches of suppliants, while the city smokes with incense and murmurs with prayer and lamentation? I would not learn from any mouth but yours, old man, therefore I question you myself. Do you know of anything that I can do and have not done? How can I, being the man I am, being King Oedipus, do other than all I know? I were indeed hard of heart did I not pity such suppliants.

PRIEST. Oedipus, King of my country, we who stand before your door are of all ages, some too young to have walked so many miles, some — priests of Zeus such as I — too old. Among us stand the pick of the young men, and behind in the market-places the people throng, carrying suppliant branches. We all stand here because the city stumbles towards death, hardly able to raise up its head. A blight has fallen upon the fruitful blossoms of the land, a blight upon flock and field and upon the bed of marriage — plague ravages the city. Oedipus, King, not God but foremost of living men, seeing that when you first came to this town of Thebes you freed us from that harsh singer, the riddling Sphinx, we beseech you, all we suppliants, to find some help; whether you find it by your power as a man, or because, being near the Gods, a God has whispered you. Uplift our State; think upon your fame; your coming brought us luck, be lucky to us still; remember that it is better to rule over men than over a waste place, since neither walled town nor ship is anything if it be empty and no man within it.

OEDIPUS. My unhappy children! I know well what need has brought you, what suffering you endure; yet, sufferers though you be, there is not a single

one whose suffering is as mine — each mourns himself, but my soul mourns the city, myself, and you. It is not therefore as if you came to arouse a sleeping man. No! Be certain that I have wept many tears and searched hither and thither for some remedy. I have already done the only thing that came into my head for all my search. I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, my own wife's brother, to the Pythian House of Phoebus, to hear if deed or word of mine may yet deliver this town. I am troubled, for he is a long time away — a longer time than should be — but when he comes I shall not be an honest man unless I do whatever the God commands.

PRIEST. YOU have spoken at the right time. They have just signalled to us that Creon has arrived.

OEDIPUS. O King Apollo, may he bring brighter fortune, for his face is shining!

PRIEST. He brings good news, for he is crowned with bay.

OEDIPUS. We shall know soon. Brother-in-law, Menoeceus' son, what news from the God?

CREON. Good news; for pain turns to pleasure when we have set the crooked straight.

OEDIPUS. But what is the oracle? — so far the news is neither good nor bad.

CREON. If you would hear it with all these about you, I am ready to speak. Or do we go within?

OEDIPUS. Speak before all. The sorrow I endure is less for my own life than these.

CREON. Then, with your leave, I speak. Our lord Phoebus bids us drive out a defiling thing that has been cherished in this land.

OEDIPUS. By what purification?

CREON. King Laius was our King before you came to pilot us.

OEDIPUS. I know — but not of my own knowledge, for I never saw him.

CREON. He was killed; and the God now bids us revenge it on his murderers, whoever they be.

OEDIPUS. Where shall we come upon their track after all these years? Did he meet his death in house or field, at home or in some foreign land?

CREON. In a foreign land: he was journeying to Delphi.

OEDIPUS. Did no fellow-traveller see the deed? Was there none there who could be questioned?

CREON. All perished but one man who fled in terror and could tell for certain but one thing of all he had seen.

OEDIPUS. One thing might be a clue to many things.

CREON. He said that they were fallen upon by a great troop of robbers.

OEDIPUS. What robbers would be so daring unless bribed from here?

CREON. Such things were indeed guessed at, but Laius once dead no avenger arose. We were amid our troubles.

OEDIPUS. But when royalty had fallen what troubles could have hindered search?

CREON. The riddling Sphinx put those dark things out of our thoughts — we thought of what had come to our own doors.

OEDIPUS. But I will start afresh and make the dark things plain. In doing right by Laius I protect myself, for whoever slew Laius might turn a hand against me. Come, my children, rise up from the altar steps; lift up these suppliant boughs and let all the children of
Cadmus be called hither that I may search out everything and find for all happiness or misery as God wills.

PRIEST. May Phoebus, sender of the oracle, come with it and be our saviour and deliverer!
The Chorus enter
What message comes to famous Thebes from the Golden House?
What message of disaster from that sweet-throated Zeus?
What monstrous thing our fathers saw do the seasons bring?
Or what that no man ever saw, what new monstrous thing?
Trembling in every limb I raise my loud importunate cry,
And in a sacred terror wait the Delian God's reply.
Apollo chase the God of Death that leads no shouting men,
Bears no rattling shield and yet consumes this form with pain.
Famine takes what the plague spares, and all the crops are lost;
No new life fills the empty place — ghost flits after ghost
To that God-trodden western shore, as flit benighted birds.

Sorrow speaks to sorrow, but no comfort finds in words.
Hurry him from the land of Thebes with a fair wind behind
Out on to that formless deep where not a man can find
Hold for an anchor-fluke, for all is world-enfolding sea;
Master of the thunder-cloud, set the lightning free,
And add the thunder-stone to that and fling them on his head,
For death is all the fashion now, till even Death be dead.
We call against the pallid face of this God-hated God
The springing heel of Artemis in the hunting sandal shod,
The tousle-headed Maenads, blown torch and drunken sound,
The stately Lysian king himself with golden fillet crowned,
And in his hands the golden bow and the stretched golden string,
And Bacchus' wine-ensanguined face that all the Maenads sing.

OEDIPUS. You are praying, and it may be that your prayer will be answered; that if you hear my words and do my bidding you may find help out of all your trouble. This is my proclamation, children of Cadmus. Whoever among you knows by what man Laius, son of Labdacus, was killed, must tell all he knows. If he fear for himself and being guilty denounce himself, he shall be in the less danger, suffering no worse thing than banishment. If on the other hand there be one that knows that a foreigner did the deed, let him speak, and I shall give him a reward and my thanks: but if any man keep silent from fear or to screen a friend, hear all what I will do to that man. No one in this land shall speak to him, nor offer sacrifice beside him; but he shall be driven from their homes as if he himself had done the deed. And in this I am the ally of the Pythian God and of the murdered man, and I pray that the murderer's life may, should he be so hidden and screened, drop from him and perish away, whoever he may be, whether he did the deed with others or by himself alone: and on you I

lay it to make — so far as man may — these words good, for my sake, and for the God's sake, and for the sake of this land. And even if the God had not spurred us to it, it were a wrong to leave the guilt unpurged, when one so noble, and he your King, had perished; and all have sinned that could have searched it out and did not: and now since it is I who hold the power which he held once, and have his wife for wife — she who would have borne him heirs had he but lived — I take up this cause even as I would were it that of my own father. And if there be any who do not obey me in it, I pray that the Gods send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb; but let them be wasted by this plague, or by one more dreadful still. But may all be blessed for ever who hear my words and do my will!

CHORUS. We do not know the murderer, and it were indeed more fitting that Phoebus, who laid the task upon us, should name the man.

OEDIPUS. NO man can make the Gods speak against their will.

CHORUS. Then I will say what seems the next best thing.

OEDIPUS. If there is a third course, show it.

CHORUS. I know that our lord Tiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus, and through him we may unravel all.

OEDIPUS. So I was advised by Creon, and twice already have I sent to bring him.

CHORUS. If we lack his help we have nothing but vague and ancient rumours.

OEDIPUS. What rumours are they? I would examine every story.

CHORUS. Certain wayfarers were said to have killed the King.

OEDIPUS. I know, I know. But who was there that saw it?

CHORUS. If there is such a man, and terror can move him, he will not keep silence when they have told him of your curses.

OEDIPUS. He that such a deed did not terrify will not be terrified because of a word.

CHORUS. But there is one who shall convict him. For the blind prophet comes at last — in whom alone of all men the truth lives.
Enter Tiresias, led by a boy

OEDIPUS. Tiresias, master of all knowledge, whatever may be spoken, whatever is unspeakable, whatever omens of earth and sky reveal, the plague is among us, and from that plague, Great Prophet, protect us and save us. Phoebus in answer to our question says that it will not leave us till we have found the murderers of Laius, and driven them into exile or put them to death. Do you therefore neglect neither the voice of birds, nor any other sort of wisdom, but rescue yourself, rescue the State, rescue me, rescue all that are defiled by the deed. For we are in your hands, and what greater task falls to a man than to help other men with all he knows and has?

TIRESIAS. Aye, and what worse task than to be wise and suffer for it?
I know this well; it slipped out of mind, or I would never have come.

OEDIPUS. What now?

TIRESIAS. Let me go home. You will bear your burden to the end more easily, and I bear mine — if you but give me leave for that.

OEDIPUS. Your words are strange and unkind to the State that bred you.

TIRESIAS. I see that you, on your part, keep your lips tight shut, and therefore I have shut mine that I may come to no misfortune.

OEDIPUS. For God's love do not turn away — if you have knowledge.
We suppliants implore you on our knees.

TIRESIAS. You are fools — I will bring misfortune neither upon you nor upon myself.

OEDIPUS. What is this? You know all and will say nothing? You are minded to betray me and Thebes?

TIRESIAS. Why do you ask these things? You will not learn them from me.

OEDIPUS. What! Basest of the base! You would enrage the very stones. Will you never speak out? Cannot anything touch you?

TIRESIAS. The future will come of itself though I keep silent.

OEDIPUS. Then seeing that come it must, you had best speak out.

TIRESIAS. I will speak no further. Rage if you have a mind to; bring out all the fierceness that is in your heart.

OEDIPUS. That will I. I will not spare to speak my thoughts. Listen to what I have to say. It seems to me that you have helped to plot the deed; and,

short of doing it with your own hands, have done the deed yourself. Had you eyesight I would declare that you alone had done it.

TIRESIAS. SO that is what you say? I charge you to obey the decree:
that you yourself have made, and from this day out to speak neither to these nor to me. You are the defiler of this land.

OEDIPUS. SO brazen in your impudence? How do you hope to escape punishment?

TIRESIAS. I have escaped; my strength is in my truth.

OEDIPUS. Who taught you this? You never got it by your art.

TIRESIAS. You, because you have spurred me to speech against my will.

OEDIPUS. What speech? Speak it again that I may learn it better.

TIRESIAS. You are but tempting me — you understood me well.
enough.

OEDIPUS. NO; not so that I can say I know it; speak it again.

TIRESIAS. I say that you are yourself the murderer that you seek.

OEDIPUS. You shall rue it for having spoken twice such outrageous words.

TIRESIAS. Would you that I say more that you may be still angrier?

OEDIPUS. Say what you will. I will not let it move me.

TIRESIAS. I say that you are living with your next of kin in unimagined shame.

OEDIPUS. DO you think you can say such things and never smart for:
it?

TIRESIAS. Yes, if there be strength in truth.

OEDIPUS. There is; yes — for everyone but you. But not for you that are maimed in ear and in eye and in wit.

TIRESIAS. You are but a poor wretch flinging taunts that in a little.
while everyone shall fling at you.

OEDIPUS. Night, endless night has covered you up so that you can neither hurt me nor any man that looks upon the sun.

TIRESIAS. Your doom is not to fall by me. Apollo is enough: it is his business to work out your doom.

OEDIPUS. Was it Creon that planned this or you yourself?

TIRESIAS. Creon is not your enemy; you are your own enemy.

OEDIPUS. Power, ability, position, you bear all burdens, and yet what envy you create! Great must that envy be if envy of my power in this town — a power put into my hands unsought — has made trusty.
Creon, my old friend Creon, secretly long to take that power from me; if he has suborned this scheming juggler, this quack and trickster, this man with eyes for his gains and blindness in his art. Come, come, where did you prove yourself a seer? Why did you say nothing to set the townsmen free when the riddling Sphinx was here?
Yet that riddle was not for the first-comer to read; it needed the skill of a seer. And none such had you! Neither found by help of birds, nor straight

from any God. No, I came; I silenced her, I the ignorant Oedipus; it was I that found the answer in my mother-wit, untaught by any birds. And it is I that you would pluck out of my place, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne. But you and the plotter of all this shall mourn despite your zeal to purge the land.
Were you not an old man, you had already learnt how bold you are and learnt it to your cost.

CHORUS. Both this man's words and yours, Oedipus, have been said in anger. Such words cannot help us here, nor any but those that teach us to obey the oracle.

TIRESIAS. King though you are, the right to answer when attacked belongs to both alike. I am not subject to you, but to Loxias; and therefore I shall never be Creon's subject. And I tell you, since you have taunted me with blindness, that though you have your sight, you cannot see in what misery you stand, nor where you are living, nor with whom, unknowing what you do — for you do not know the stock you come of — you have been your own kin's enemy be they living or be they dead. And one day a mother's curse and father's curse alike shall drive you from this land in dreadful haste with darkness upon those eyes. Therefore, heap your scorn on Creon and on my message if you have a mind to; for no one of living men shall be crushed as you shall be crushed.

OEDIPUS. Begone this instant! Away, away! Get you from these doors!

TIRESIAS. I had never come but that you sent for me.

OEDIPUS. I did not know you were mad.

TIRESIAS. I may seem mad to you, but your parents thought me sane.

OEDIPUS. My parents! Stop! Who was my father?

TIRESIAS. This day shall you know your birth; and it will ruin you.

OEDIPUS. What dark words you always speak!

TIRESIAS. But are you not most skilful in the unravelling of dark words?

OEDIPUS. YOU mock me for that which made me great?

TIRESIAS. It was that fortune that undid you.

OEDIPUS. What do I care? For I delivered all this town.

TIRESIAS. Then I will go: boy, lead me out of this.

OEDIPUS. Yes, let him lead you. You take vexation with you.

TIRESIAS. I will go: but first I will do my errand. For frown though you may you cannot destroy me. The man for whom you look, the man you have been threatening in all the proclamations about the death of Laius, that man is here. He seems, so far as looks go, an alien; yet he shall be found a native Theban and shall nowise be glad of that fortune. A blind man, though now he has his sight; a beggar, though now he is most rich; he shall go forth feeling the ground before him with his stick; so you go in and think on that, and if you find I am in fault say that I have no skill in prophecy.

[Tiresias is led out by the boy. Oedipus enters the palace.

CHORUS. The Delphian rock has spoken out, now must a wicked mind,
Planner of things I dare not speak and of this bloody wrack,
Pray for feet that are as fast as the four hoofs of the wind:
Cloudy Parnassus and the Fates thunder at his back.
That sacred crossing-place of lines upon Parnassus' head,
Lines that have run through North and South, and run through West and East,
That navel of the world bids all men search the mountain wood,
The solitary cavern, till they have found that infamous beast.
Creon enters from the house

CREON. Fellow-citizens, having heard that King Oedipus accuses me of dreadful things, I come in my indignation. Does he think that he has suffered wrong from me in these present troubles, or anything that could lead to wrong, whether in word or deed? How can I live under blame like that? What life would be worth having if by you here, and by my nearest friends, called a traitor through the town?

CHORUS. He said it in anger, and not from his heart out.

CREON. He said it was I put up the seer to speak those falsehoods.

CHORUS. Such things were said.

CREON. And had he his right mind saying it?

CHORUS. I do not know — I do not know what my masters do.
Oedipus enters.

OEDIPUS. What brought you here? Have you a face so brazen that you come to my house — you, the proved assassin of its master — the certain

robber of my crown? Come, tell me in the face of the Gods what cowardice, or folly, did you discover in me that you plotted this? Did you think that I would not see what you were at till you had crept upon me, or seeing it would not ward it off? What madness to seek a throne, having neither friends nor followers!

CREON. NOW listen, hear my answer, and then you may with knowledge judge between us.

OEDIPUS. YOU are plausible, but waste words now that I know you.

CREON. Hear what I have to say. I can explain it all.

OEDIPUS. One thing you will not explain away — that you are my enemy.

CREON. YOU are a fool to imagine that senseless stubbornness sits well upon you.

OEDIPUS. And you to imagine that you can wrong a kinsman and escape the penalty.

CREON. That is justly said, I grant you; but what is this wrong that you complain of?

OEDIPUS. Did you advise, or not, that I should send for that notorious prophet?

CREON. And I am of the same mind still.

OEDIPUS. HOW long is it, then, since Laius —

CREON. What, what about him?

OEDIPUS. Since Laius was killed by an unknown hand?

CREON. That was many years ago.

OEDIPUS. Was this prophet at his trade in those days?

CREON. Yes; skilled as now and in equal honour.

OEDIPUS. Did he ever speak of me?

CREON. Never certainly when I was within earshot.

OEDIPUS. And did you enquire into the murder?

CREON. We did enquire but learnt nothing.

OEDIPUS. And why did he not tell out his story then?

CREON. I do not know. When I know nothing I say nothing.

OEDIPUS. This much at least you know and can say out.

CREON. What is that? If I know it I will say it.

OEDIPUS. That if he had not consulted you he would never have said that it was I who killed Laius.

CREON. You know best what he said; but now, question for question.

OEDIPUS. Question your fill — I cannot be proved guilty of that blood.

CREON. Answer me then. Are you not married to my sister?

OEDIPUS. That cannot be denied.

CREON. And do you not rule as she does? And with a like power?

OEDIPUS. I give her all she asks for.

CREON. And am not I the equal of you both?

OEDIPUS. Yes: and that is why you are so false a friend.

CREON. Not so; reason this out as I reason it, and first weigh this:
who would prefer to lie awake amid terrors rather than to sleep in peace, granting that his power is equal in both cases? Neither I nor any sober-minded man. You give me what I ask and let me do what I want, but were I King I would have to do things I did not want to do. Is not influence and no trouble with it better than any throne, am I such a fool as to hunger after unprofitable honours?
Now all are glad to see me, everyone wishes me well, all that want a favour from you ask speech of me — finding in that their hope.
Why should I give up these things and take those? No wise mind is treacherous. I am no contriver of plots, and if another took to them he would not come to me for help. And in proof of this go to the Pythian Oracle, and ask if I have truly told what the Gods said:
and after that, if you have found that I have plotted with the Soothsayer, take me and kill me; not by the sentence of one mouth only — but of two mouths, yours and my own. But do not condemn me in a corner, upon some fancy and without proof. What right have you to declare a good man bad or a bad good? It is as bad a thing to cast off a true friend as it is for a man to cast away his own life — but you will learn these things with certainty when the time comes; for time alone shows a just man; though a day can show a knave.

CHORUS. King! He has spoken well, he gives himself time to think; a headlong talker does not know what he is saying.

OEDIPUS. The plotter is at his work, and I must counterplot headlong, or he will get his ends and I miss mine.

CREON. What will you do then? Drive me from the land?

OEDIPUS. Not so; I do not desire your banishment — but your death.

CREON. YOU are not sane.

OEDIPUS. I am sane at least in my own interest.

CREON. You should be in mine also.

OEDIPUS. NO, for you are false.

CREON. But if you understand nothing?

OEDIPUS. Yet I must rule.

CREON. Not if you rule badly.

OEDIPUS. Hear him, O Thebes!

CREON. Thebes is for me also, not for you alone.

CHORUS. Cease, princes: I see Jocasta coming out of the house; she comes just in time to quench the quarrel.
Jocasta enters

JOCASTA. Unhappy men! Why have you made this crazy uproar? Are you not ashamed to quarrel about your own affairs when the whole country is in trouble? Go back into the palace, Oedipus, and you, Creon, to your own house. Stop making all this noise about some petty thing.

CREON. Your husband is about to kill me — or to drive me from the land of my fathers.

OEDIPUS. Yes: for I have convicted him of treachery against me.

CREON. Now may I perish accursed if I have done such a thing!

JOCASTA. For God's love believe it, Oedipus. First, for the sake of his oath, and then for my sake, and for the sake of these people here.

CHORUS *[all].* King, do what she asks.

OEDIPUS. What would you have me do?

CHORUS. Not to make a dishonourable charge, with no more evidence than rumour, against a friend who has bound himself with an oath.

OEDIPUS. DO you desire my exile or my death?

CHORUS. NO, by Helios, by the first of all the Gods, may I die abandoned by Heaven and earth if I have that thought! What breaks my heart is that our public griefs should be increased by your quarrels.

OEDIPUS. Then let him go, though I am doomed thereby to death or to be thrust dishonoured from the land; it is your lips, not his, that move me to compassion; wherever he goes my hatred follows him.

CREON. YOU are as sullen in yielding as you were vehement in anger, but such natures are their own heaviest burden.

OEDIPUS. Why will you not leave me in peace and begone?

CREON. I will go away; what is your hatred to me? In the eyes of all here I am a just man.
[He goes.

CHORUS. Lady, why do you not take your man in to the house?

JOCASTA. I will do so when I have learned what has happened.

CHORUS. The half of it was blind suspicion bred of talk; the rest the wounds left by injustice.

JOCASTA. It was on both sides?

CHORUS. Yes.

JOCASTA. What was it?

CHORUS. Our land is vexed enough. Let the thing alone now that it is over.

JOCASTA. In the name of the Gods, King, what put you in this anger?

OEDIPUS. I will tell you; for I honour you more than these men do.
The cause is Creon and his plots against me.

JOCASTA. Speak on, if you can tell clearly how this quarrel arose.

OEDIPUS. He says that I am guilty of the blood of Laius.

JOCASTA. On his own knowledge, or on hearsay?

OEDIPUS. He has made a rascal of a seer his mouthpiece.

JOCASTA. DO not fear that there is truth in what he says. Listen to me, and learn to your comfort that nothing born of woman can know what is to come. I will give you proof of that. An oracle came to
Laius once, I will not say from Phoebus, but from his ministers, that he was doomed to die by the hand of his own child sprung from him and me. When his child was but three days old, Laius bound its feet together and had it thrown by sure hands upon a trackless mountain; and when Laius was murdered at the place where three highways meet, it was, or so at least the rumour says, by foreign robbers.
So Apollo did not bring it about that the child should kill its father, nor did Laius die in the dreadful way he feared by his child's hand.
Yet that was how the message of the seers mapped out the future.
Pay no attention to such things. What the God would show he will need no help to show it, but bring it to light himself.

OEDIPUS. What restlessness of soul, lady, has come upon me since I heard you speak, what a tumult of the mind!

JOCASTA. What is this new anxiety? What has startled you?

OEDIPUS. YOU said that Laius was killed where three highways meet.

JOCASTA. Yes: that was the story.

OEDIPUS. And where is the place?

JOCASTA. In Phocis where the road divides branching off to Delphi and to Daulia.

OEDIPUS. And when did it happen? How many years ago?

JOCASTA. News was published in this town just before you came into power.

OEDIPUS. O Zeus! What have you planned to do unto me?

JOCASTA. He was tall; the silver had just come into his hair; and in shape not greatly unlike to you.

OEDIPUS. Unhappy that I am! It seems that I have laid a dreadful curse upon myself, and did not know it.

JOCASTA. What do you say? I tremble when I look on you, my King.

OEDIPUS. And I have a misgiving that the seer can see indeed. But I will know it all more clearly, if you tell me one thing more.

JOCASTA. Indeed, though I tremble I will answer whatever you ask.

OEDIPUS. Had he but a small troop with him; or did he travel like a great man with many followers?

JOCASTA. There were but five in all — one of them a herald; and there was one carriage with Laius in it.

OEDIPUS. Alas! It is now clear indeed. Who was it brought the news, lady?

JOCASTA. A servant — the one survivor.

OEDIPUS. IS he by chance in the house now?

JOCASTA. NO; for when he found you reigning instead of Laius he besought me, his hand clasped in mine, to send him to the fields among the cattle that he might be far from the sight of this town; and I sent him. He was a worthy man for a slave and might have asked a bigger thing.

OEDIPUS. I would have him return to us without delay.

JOCASTA. Oedipus, it is easy. But why do you ask this?

OEDIPUS. I fear that I have said too much, and therefore I would question him.

JOCASTA. He shall come, but I too have a right to know what lies so heavy upon your heart, my King.

OEDIPUS. Yes: and it shall not be kept from you now that my fear has grown so heavy. Nobody is more to me than you, nobody has the same right to learn my good or evil luck. My father was Polybus of Corinth, my mother the Dorian Merope, and I was held the foremost man in all that town until a thing happened — a thing to startle a man, though not to make him angry as it made me. We were sitting at the table, and a man who had drunk too much cried out that I was not my father's son — and I, though angry, restrained my anger for that day; but the next day went to my father and my mother and questioned them. They were indignant at the taunt and that comforted me — and yet the man's words rankled, for they had spread a rumour through the town. Without consulting my father or my mother I went to Delphi, but Phoebus told me nothing of the thing for which I came,

but much of other things — things of sorrow and of terror: that I should live in incest with my mother, and beget a brood that men would shudder to look upon; that I should be my father's murderer. Hearing those words I fled out of Corinth, and from that day have but known where it lies when I have found its direction by the stars. I sought where I might escape those infamous things — the doom that was laid upon me. I came in my flight to that very spot where you tell me this king perished. Now, lady, I will tell you the truth. When I had come close up to those three roads, I came upon a herald, and a man like him you have described seated in a carriage. The man who held the reins and the old man himself would not give me room, but thought to force me from the path, and I struck the driver in my anger. The old man, seeing what I had done, waited till I was passing him and then struck me upon the head. I paid him back in full, for I knocked him out of the carriage with a blow of my stick. He rolled on his back, and after that I killed them all. If this stranger were indeed Laius, is there a more miserable man in the world than the man before you? Is there a man more hated of Heaven?
No stranger, no citizen, may receive him into his house, not a soul may speak to him, and no mouth but my own mouth has laid this curse upon me. Am I not wretched? May I be swept from this world before I have endured this doom!

CHORUS. These things, O King, fill us with terror; yet hope till you speak with him that saw the deed and have learnt all.

OEDIPUS. Till I have learnt all, I may hope. I await the man that is coming from the pastures.

JOCASTA. What is it that you hope to learn?

OEDIPUS. I will tell you. If his tale agrees with yours, then I am clear.

JOCASTA. What tale of mine?

OEDIPUS. He told you that Laius met his death from robbers; if he keeps to that tale now and speaks of several slayers, I am not the slayer. But if he says one lonely wayfarer, then beyond a doubt the scale dips to me.

JOCASTA. Be certain of this much at least, his first tale was of robbers.
He cannot revoke that tale — the city heard it and not I alone. Yet, if he should somewhat change his story, King, at least he cannot make the murder of Laius square with prophecy; for Loxias plainly said of Laius that he would die by the hand of my child.
That poor innocent did not kill him, for it died before him. Therefore from this out I would not, for all divination can do, so much as look to my right hand or to my left hand, or fear at all.

OEDIPUS. YOU have judged well; and yet for all that, send and bring this peasant to me.

JOCASTA. I will send without delay. I will do all that you would have of me — but let us come in to the house.
[They go in to the house.

CHORUS. For this one thing above all I would be praised as a man,
That in my words and my deeds I have kept those laws in mind
Olympian Zeus, and that high clear Empyrean,
Fashioned, and not some man or people of mankind,
Even those sacred laws nor age nor sleep can blind.
A man becomes a tyrant out of insolence,

He climbs and climbs, until all people call him great,
He seems upon the summit, and God flings him thence;
Yet an ambitious man may lift up a whole State,
And in his death be blessed, in his life fortunate.
And all men honour such; but should a man forget
The holy images, the Delphian Sybil's trance,
And the world's navel-stone, and not be punished for it
And seem most fortunate, or even blessed perchance,
Why should we honour the Gods, or join the sacred dance?
Jocasta enters from the palace

JOCASTA. It has come into my head, citizens of Thebes, to visit every altar of the Gods, a wreath in my hand and a dish of incense. For all manner of alarms trouble the soul of Oedipus, who instead of weighing new oracles by old, like a man of sense, is at the mercy of every mouth that speaks terror. Seeing that my words are nothing to him, I cry to you, Lysian Apollo, whose altar is the first I meet: I come, a suppliant, bearing symbols of prayer; O, make us clean, for now we are all afraid, seeing him afraid, even as they who see the helmsman afraid.

Enter Messenger

MESSENGER. May I learn from you, strangers, where is the home of
King Oedipus? Or better still, tell me where he himself is, if you know.

CHORUS. This is his house, and he himself, stranger, is within it, and this lady is the mother of his children.

MESSENGER. Then I call a blessing upon her, seeing what man she has married.

JOCASTA. May God reward those words with a like blessing, stranger! But what have you come to seek or to tell?

MESSENGER. Good news for your house, lady, and for your husband.

JOCASTA. What news? From whence have you come?

MESSENGER. From Corinth, and you will rejoice at the message I am about to give you; yet, maybe, it will grieve you.

JOCASTA. What is it? How can it have this double power?

MESSENGER. The people of Corinth, they say, will take him for king.

JOCASTA. HOW then? Is old Poly bus no longer on the throne?

MESSENGER. No. He is in his tomb.

JOCASTA. What do you say? Is Polybus dead, old man?

MESSENGER. May I drop dead if it is not the truth.

JOCASTA. Away! Hurry to your master with this news. O oracle of the Gods, where are you now? This is the man whom Oedipus feared and shunned lest he should murder him, and now this man has died a natural death, and not by the hand of Oedipus.
Enter Oedipus

OEDIPUS. Jocasta, dearest wife, why have you called me from the house?

JOCASTA. Listen to this man, and judge to what the oracles of the Gods have come.

OEDIPUS. And he — who may he be? And what news has he?

JOCASTA. He has come from Corinth to tell you that your father, Polybus, is dead.

OEDIPUS. How, stranger? Let me have it from your own mouth.

MESSENGER. If I am to tell the story, the first thing is that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS. By some sickness or by treachery?

MESSENGER. A little thing can bring the aged to their rest.

OEDIPUS. Ah! He died, it seems, from sickness?

MESSENGER. Yes; and of old age.

OEDIPUS. Alas! Alas! Why, indeed, my wife, should one look to that Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads? For they would have it that I was doomed to kill my father. And now he is dead — hid already beneath the earth. And here am I — who had no part in it, unless indeed he died from longing for me. If that were so, I may have caused his death; but Polybus has carried the oracles with him into Hades — the oracles as men have understood them — and they are worth nothing.

JOCASTA. Did I not tell you so, long since?

OEDIPUS. YOU did, but fear misled me.

JOCASTA. Put this trouble from you.

OEDIPUS. Those bold words would sound better, were not my mother living. But as it is — I have some grounds for fear; yet you have said well.

JOCASTA. Yet your father's death is a sign that all is well.

OEDIPUS. I know that: but I fear because of her who lives.

MESSENGER. Who is this woman who makes you afraid?

OEDIPUS. Merope, old man, the wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER. What is there in her to make you afraid?

OEDIPUS. A dreadful oracle sent from Heaven, stranger.

MESSENGER. IS it a secret, or can you speak it out?

OEDIPUS. Loxias said that I was doomed to marry my own mother, and to shed my father's blood. For that reason I fled from my house in Corinth; and I did right, though there is great comfort in familiar faces.

MESSENGER. Was it indeed for that reason that you went into exile?

OEDIPUS. I did not wish, old man, to shed my father's blood.

MESSENGER. King, have I not freed you from that fear?

OEDIPUS. YOU shall be fittingly rewarded.

MESSENGER. Indeed, to tell the truth, it was for that I came; to bring you home and be the better for it —

OEDIPUS. NO! I will never go to my parents' home.

MESSENGER. Ah, my son, it is plain enough, you do not know what you do.

OEDIPUS. HOW, old man? For God's love, tell me.

MESSENGER. If for these reasons you shrink from going home.

OEDIPUS. I am afraid lest Phoebus has spoken true.

MESSENGER. YOU are afraid of being made guilty through Merope?

OEDIPUS. That is my constant fear.

MESSENGER. A vain fear.

OEDIPUS. HOW so, if I was born of that father and mother?

MESSENGER. Because they were nothing to you in blood.

OEDIPUS. What do you say? Was Polybus not my father?

MESSENGER. NO more nor less than myself.

OEDIPUS. How can my father be no more to me than you who are nothing to me?

MESSENGER. He did not beget you any more than I.

OEDIPUS. No? Then why did he call me his son?

MESSENGER. He took you as a gift from these hands of mine.

OEDIPUS. HOW could he love so dearly what came from another's hands?

MESSENGER. He had been childless.

OEDIPUS. If I am not your son, where did you get me?

MESSENGER. In a wooded valley of Cithaeron.

OEDIPUS. What brought you wandering there?

MESSENGER. I was in charge of mountain sheep.

OEDIPUS. A shepherd — a wandering, hired man.

MESSENGER. A hired man who came just in time.

OEDIPUS. Just in time — had it come to that?

MESSENGER. Have not the cords left their marks upon your ankles?

OEDIPUS. Yes, that is an old trouble.

MESSENGER. I took your feet out of the spancel.

OEDIPUS. I have had those marks from the cradle.

MESSENGER. They have given you the name you bear.

OEDIPUS. Tell me, for God's sake, was that deed my mother's or my father's?

MESSENGER. I do not know — he who gave you to me knows more of that than I.

OEDIPUS. What? You had me from another? You did not chance on me yourself?

MESSENGER. NO. Another shepherd gave you to me.

OEDIPUS. Who was he? Can you tell me who he was?

MESSENGER. I think that he was said to be of Laius' household.

OEDIPUS. The king who ruled this country long ago?

MESSENGER. The same — the man was herdsman in his service.

OEDIPUS. IS he alive, that I might speak with him?

MESSENGER. YOU people of this country should know that.

OEDIPUS. IS there anyone here present who knows the herd he speaks of? Anyone who has seen him in the town pastures? The hour has come when all must be made clear.

CHORUS. I think he is the very herd you sent for but now; Jocasta can tell you better than I.

JOCASTA. Why ask about that man? Why think about him? Why waste a thought on what this man has said? What he has said is of no account.

OEDIPUS. What, with a clue like that in my hands and fail to find out my birth?

JOCASTA. For God's sake, if you set any value upon your life, give up this search — my misery is enough.

OEDIPUS. Though I be proved the son of a slave, yes, even of three generations of slaves, you cannot be made base-born.

JOCASTA. Yet, hear me, I implore you. Give up this search.

OEDIPUS. I will not hear of anything but searching the whole thing out.

JOCASTA. I am only thinking of your good — I have advised you for the best.

OEDIPUS. Your advice makes me impatient.

JOCASTA. May you never come to know who you are, unhappy man!

OEDIPUS. GO, someone, bring the herdsman here — and let that woman glory in her noble blood.

JOCASTA. Alas, alas, miserable man! Miserable! That is all that I can call you now or for ever.
[She goes out.

CHORUS. Why has the lady gone, Oedipus, in such a transport of despair? Out of this silence will burst a storm of sorrows.

OEDIPUS. Let come what will. However lowly my origin I will discover it. That woman, with all a woman's pride, grows red with shame at my base birth. I think myself the child of Good Luck, and that the years are my foster-brothers. Sometimes they have set me up, and sometimes thrown me down, but he that has Good Luck for mother can suffer no dishonour. That is my origin, nothing can change it, so why should I renounce this search into my birth?

CHORUS. Oedipus' nurse, mountain of many a hidden glen,
Be honoured among men;
A famous man, deep-thoughted, and his body strong;
Be honoured in dance and song.
Who met in the hidden glen? Who let his fancy run
Upon nymph of Helicon?
Lord Pan or Lord Apollo or the mountain Lord
By the Bacchantes adored?

OEDIPUS. If I, who have never met the man, may venture to say so, I think that the herdsman we await approaches; his venerable age matches with this stranger's, and I recognise as servants of mine those who bring him. But you, if you have seen the man before, will know the man better than I.

CHORUS. Yes, I know the man who is coming; he was indeed in
Laius' service, and is still the most trusted of the herdsmen.

OEDIPUS. I ask you first, Corinthian stranger, is this the man you mean?

MESSENGER. He is the very man.

OEDIPUS. Look at me, old man! Answer my questions. Were you once in Laius' service?

HERDSMAN. I was: not a bought slave, but reared up in the house.

OEDIPUS. What was your work — your manner of life?

HERDSMAN. For the best part of my life I have tended flocks.

OEDIPUS. Where, mainly?

HERDSMAN. Cithaeron or its neighbourhood.

OEDIPUS. DO you remember meeting with this man there?

HERDSMAN. What man do you mean?

OEDIPUS. This man. Did you ever meet him?

HERDSMAN. I cannot recall him to mind.

MESSENGER. NO wonder in that, master; but I will bring back his memory. He and I lived side by side upon Cithaeron. I had but one flock and he had two. Three full half-years we lived there, from spring to autumn, and every winter I drove my flock to my own fold, while he drove his to the fold of Laius. Is that right? Was it not so?

HERDSMAN. True enough; though it was long ago.

MESSENGER. Come, tell me now — do you remember giving me a boy to rear as my own foster-son?

HERDSMAN. What are you saying? Why do you ask me that?

MESSENGER. Look at that man, my friend, he is the child you gave me.

HERDSMAN. A plague upon you! Cannot you hold your tongue?

OEDIPUS. DO not blame him, old man; your own words are more blameable.

HERDSMAN. And how have I offended, master?

OEDIPUS. In not telling of that boy he asks of.

HERDSMAN. He speaks from ignorance, and does not know what he is saying.

OEDIPUS. If you will not speak with a good grace you shall be made to speak.

HERDSMAN. DO not hurt me for the love of God, I am an old man.

OEDIPUS. Someone there, tie his hands behind his back.

HERDSMAN. Alas! Wherefore! What more would you learn?

OEDIPUS. Did you give this man the child he speaks of?

HERDSMAN. I did: would I had died that day!

OEDIPUS. Well, you may come to that unless you speak the truth.

HERDSMAN. Much more am I lost if I speak it.

OEDIPUS. What! Would the fellow make more delay?

HERDSMAN. NO, no. I said before that I gave it to him.

OEDIPUS. Where did you come by it? Your own child, or another?

HERDSMAN. It was not my own child — I had it from another.

OEDIPUS. From any of those here? From what house?

HERDSMAN. DO not ask any more, master; for the love of God do not ask.

OEDIPUS. YOU are lost if I have to question you again.

HERDSMAN. It was a child from the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS. A slave? Or one of his own race?

HERDSMAN. Alas! I am on the edge of dreadful words.

OEDIPUS. And I of hearing: yet hear I must.

HERDSMAN. It was said to have been his own child. But your lady within can tell you of these things best.

OEDIPUS. HOW? It was she who gave it to you?

HERDSMAN. Yes, King.

OEDIPUS. TO what end?

HERDSMAN. That I should make away with it.

OEDIPUS. Her own child?

HERDSMAN. Yes: from fear of evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS. What prophecies?

HERDSMAN. That he should kill his father.

OEDIPUS. Why, then, did you give him up to this old man?

HERDSMAN. Through pity, master, believing that he would carry him to whatever land he had himself come from — but he saved him for dreadful

misery; for if you are what this man says, you are the most miserable of all men.

OEDIPUS. O! O! All brought to pass! All truth! Now, O light, may I look my last upon you, having been found accursed in bloodshed, accursed in marriage, and in my coming into the world accursed!
[He rushes into the palace.

CHORUS. What can the shadow-like generations of man attain
But build up a dazzling mockery of delight that under their touch dissolves again?
Oedipus seemed blessed, but there is no man blessed amongst men.
Oedipus overcame the woman-breasted Fate;
He seemed like a strong tower against Death and first among the fortunate;
He sat upon the ancient throne of Thebes, and all men called him great.
But, looking for a marriage-bed, he found the bed of his birth,
Tilled the field his father had tilled, cast seed into the same abounding earth;
Entered through the door that had sent him wailing forth.
Begetter and begot as one! How could that be hid?
What darkness cover up that marriage-bed? Time watches, he is eagle-eyed,
And all the works of man are known and every soul is tried.
Would you had never come to Thebes, nor to this house,
Nor riddled with the woman-breasted Fate, beaten off Death and succoured us,
That I had never raised this song, heartbroken Oedipus!

SECOND MESSENGER *[coming from the house}.* Friends and kinsmen of this house! What deeds must you look upon, what burden of sorrow bear, if

true to race you still love the House of Labdacus.
For not Ister nor Phasis could wash this house clean, so many misfortunes have been brought upon it, so many has it brought upon itself, and those misfortunes are always the worst that a man brings upon himself.

CHORUS. Great already are the misfortunes of this house, and you bring us a new tale.

SECOND MESSENGER. A short tale in the telling: Jocasta, our Queen, is dead.

CHORUS. Alas, miserable woman, how did she die?

SECOND MESSENGER. By her own hand. It cannot be as terrible to you as to one that saw it with his eyes, yet so far as words can serve, you shall see it. When she had come into the vestibule, she ran half crazed towards her marriage-bed, clutching at her hair with the fingers of both hands, and once within the chamber dashed the doors together behind her. Then called upon the name of Laius, long since dead, remembering that son who killed the father and upon the mother begot an accursed race. And wailed because of that marriage wherein she had borne a twofold race — husband by husband, children by her child. Then Oedipus with a shriek burst in and rushing here and there asked for a sword, asked where he would find the wife that was no wife but a mother who had borne his children and himself. Nobody answered him, we all stood dumb; but supernatural power helped him, for, with a dreadful shriek, as though beckoned, he sprang at the double doors, drove them in, burst the bolts out of their sockets, and ran into the room. There we saw the woman hanging in a swinging halter, and with a terrible cry he loosened the halter from her neck.
When that unhappiest woman lay stretched upon the ground, we saw

another dreadful sight. He dragged the golden brooches from her dress and lifting them struck them upon his eyeballs, crying out, ‘You have looked enough upon those you ought never to have looked upon, failed long enough to know those that you should have known; henceforth you shall be dark’. He struck his eyes, not once, but many times, lifting his hands and speaking such or like words. The blood poured down and not with a few slow drops, but all at once over his beard in a dark shower as it were hail.
[The Chorus wails and he steps further on to the stage.]
Such evils have come forth from the deeds of those two and fallen not on one alone but upon husband and wife. They inherited much happiness, much good fortune; but to-day, ruin, shame, death, and loud crying, all evils that can be counted up, all, all are theirs.

CHORUS. IS he any quieter?

SECOND MESSENGER. He cries for someone to unbar the gates and to show to all the men of Thebes his father’s murderer, his mother’s — the unholy word must not be spoken. It is his purpose to cast himself out of the land that he may not bring all this house under his curse. But he has not the strength to do it. He must be supported and led away. The curtain is parting; you are going to look upon a sight which even those who shudder must pity.
Enter Oedipus

OEDIPUS. Woe, woe is me! Miserable, miserable that I am! Where am I? Where am I going? Where am I cast away? Who hears my words?

CHORUS. Cast away indeed, dreadful to the sight of the eye, dreadful to the ear.

OEDIPUS. Ah, friend, the only friend left to me, friend still faithful to the blind man! I know that you are there; blind though I am, I recognise your voice.

CHORUS. Where did you get the courage to put out your eyes? What unearthly power drove you to that?

OEDIPUS. Apollo, friends, Apollo, but it was my own hand alone, wretched that I am, that quenched these eyes.

CHORUS. YOU were better dead than blind.

OEDIPUS. NO, it is better to be blind. What sight is there that could give me joy? How could I have looked into the face of my father when I came among the dead, aye, or on my miserable mother, since against them both I sinned such things that no halter can punish? And what to me this spectacle, town, statue, wall, and what to me this people, since I, thrice wretched, I, noblest of Theban men, have doomed myself to banishment, doomed myself when I commanded all to thrust out the unclean thing?

CHORUS. It had indeed been better if that herdsman had never taken your feet out of the spancel or brought you back to life.

OEDIPUS. O three roads, O secret glen; O coppice and narrow way where three roads met; you that drank up the blood I spilt, the blood that was my own, my father’s blood: remember what deeds I wrought for you to look upon, and then, when I had come hither, the new deeds that I wrought. O marriage-bed that gave me birth and after that gave children to your child, creating an incestuous kindred of fathers, brothers, sons, wives, and

mothers. Yes, all the shame and the uncleanness that I have wrought among men.

CHORUS. For all my pity I shudder and turn away.

OEDIPUS. Come near, condescend to lay your hands upon a wretched man; listen, do not fear. My plague can touch no man but me. Hide me somewhere out of this land for God's sake, or kill me, or throw me into the sea where you shall never look upon me more.
Enter Creon and attendants

CHORUS. Here Creon comes at a fit moment; you can ask of him what you will, help or counsel, for he is now in your place. He is King.

OEDIPUS. What can I say to him? What can I claim, having been altogether unjust to him?

CREON. I have not come in mockery, Oedipus, nor to reproach you.
Lead him in to the house as quickly as you can. Do not let him display his misery before strangers.

OEDIPUS. I must obey, but first, since you have come in so noble a spirit, you will hear me.

CREON. Say what you will.

OEDIPUS. I know that you will give her that lies within such a tomb as befits your own blood, but there is something more, Creon. My sons are men and can take care of themselves, but my daughters, my two unhappy daughters, that have ever eaten at my own table and shared my food, watch over my daughters, Creon. If it is lawful, let me touch them with my hands.

Grant it, Prince, grant it, noble heart. I would believe, could I touch them, that I still saw them. *[Ismene and Antigone are led in by attendants.]* But do I hear them sobbing? Has Creon pitied me and sent my children, my darlings? Has he done this?

CREON. Yes, I ordered it, for I know how greatly you have always loved them.

OEDIPUS. Then may you be blessed, and may Heaven be kinder to you than it has been to me! My children, where are you? Come hither — hither — come to the hands of him whose mother was your mother; the hands that put out your father's eyes, eyes once as bright as your own; his who, understanding nothing, seeing nothing, became your father by her that bore him. I weep when I think of the bitter life that men will make you live, and the days that are to come. Into what company dare you go, to what festival, but that you shall return home from it not sharing in the joys, but bathed in tears? When you are old enough to be married, what man dare face the reproach that must cling to you and to your children? What misery is there lacking? Your father killed his father, he begat you at the spring of his own being, offspring of her that bore him. That is the taunt that would be cast upon you and on the man that you should marry. That man is not alive; my children, you must wither away in barrenness. Ah, son of Menoeceus, listen. Seeing that you are the only father now left to them, for we their parents are lost, both of us lost, do not let them wander in beggary — are they not your own kindred? — do not let them sink down into my misery. No, pity them, seeing them utterly wretched in helpless childhood if you do not protect them. Show me that you promise, generous man, by touching me with your hand.
[Creon touches him.] My children, there is much advice that I would give

you were you but old enough to understand, but all I can do now is bid you pray that you may live wherever you are let live, and that your life be happier than your father's.

CREON. Enough of tears. Pass into the house.

OEDIPUS. I will obey, though upon conditions.

CREON. Conditions?

OEDIPUS. Banish me from this country. I know that nothing can destroy me, for I wait some incredible fate; yet cast me upon
Cithaeron, chosen by my father and my mother for my tomb.

CREON. Only the Gods can say yes or no to that.

OEDIPUS. No, for I am hateful to the Gods.

CREON. If that be so you will get your wish the quicker. They will banish that which they hate.

OEDIPUS. Are you certain of that?

CREON. I would not say it if I did not mean it.

OEDIPUS. Then it is time to lead me within.

CREON. Come, but let your children go.

OEDIPUS. No, do not take them from me.

CREON. DO not seek to be master; you won the mastery but could not keep it to the end.

[He leads Oedipus into the palace, followed by Ismene, Antigone, and attendants.

CHORUS. Make way for Oedipus. All people said,
‘That is a fortunate man’;
And now what storms are beating on his head!
Call no man fortunate that is not dead.
The dead are free from pain.

Curtain

Oedipus at Colonus

Based on Sophocles' Play

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Oedipus
Creon, King of Thebes
Daughters of Oedipus:
Antigonel, *brother-in-law of Oedipus*
Ismene —
A Stranger
Polyneices, *son of Oedipus*
A Messenger
Theseus, King of Athens —
Chorus
Servants and Soldiers

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

SCENE: *The neighbourhood of Athens, near a shrine*

OEDIPUS. TO what town or country have we come, Antigone? Who to-day gives alms to the blind man, to wandering Oedipus? I ask little and get less and am content; where there is nobility of character suffering teaches patience, and we have been long enough together to learn that lesson. Bring me, daughter, to some place, to some sacred place perhaps, where we can rest and speak to a passer-by, and find out where we are and what we are to do. We must do whatever they bid us.

ANTIGONE. I can see the distant towers of a city, and this place seems to be sacred; it is shaded with laurels, olives and vines, and nightingales are singing. So sit down upon this stone; you have travelled far for an old man.

OEDIPUS. Seat me upon it and keep a watch over the blind man.

ANTIGONE. I have no need to learn that.

OEDIPUS. Where are we?

ANTIGONE. I do not know this place, but the town I see is Athens.

OEDIPUS. Every passer-by has told us that.

ANTIGONE. Shall I find somebody to tell us where we are?

OEDIPUS. Yes, child, if the place is inhabited.

ANTIGONE. Inhabited it certainly is, but I need not search: somebody is coming.

OEDIPUS. Coming towards us?

ANTIGONE. He is already beside us; ask whatever you want to know.
Enter Stranger, a man of Colonus

OEDIPUS. Stranger, this girl who has sight both for herself and for me tells me that you are there. There is something I would ask.

STRANGER. Get up from that seat before you ask it. You are in a place where no man is permitted to set his foot.

OEDIPUS. What place? And to what God sacred?

STRANGER. A place where none may set his foot, for it belongs to the Dreadful Goddesses, daughters of the earth and of darkness.

OEDIPUS. I will pray to them if you tell me their names.

STRANGER. We natives call them the Furies, but there are pleasanter names.

OEDIPUS. I beseech them to be gracious to me and to welcome me, for never will I leave this place.

STRANGER. What do you mean by those words?

OEDIPUS. My fate.

STRANGER. I cannot remove you by force until I have reported to the authorities and got their warrant.

OEDIPUS. Seeing that I am an unlucky wanderer, do not for God's love refuse to answer my questions.

STRANGER. Question and I will answer.

OEDIPUS. Into what manner of country have I come?

STRANGER. The whole neighbourhood is sacred, sacred to Poseidon and to Prometheus the Firebringer; but the spot where you are seated protects Athens and is called the Brazen Threshold. And the first Lord of the Manor was named Colonus, and all his people bear his name as well as their own. Such is this neighbourhood. It is not famous in history, but it is dear to those that inhabit it.

OEDIPUS. SO, then, there are inhabitants?

STRANGER. Yes, all that bear the name of that settler.

OEDIPUS. Have they a king? Or do they decide everything for themselves?

STRANGER. The King of Athens rules them.

OEDIPUS. What is his name?

STRANGER. Theseus, son of Aegeus.

OEDIPUS. Could someone go to him with a message?

STRANGER. With what object? To bring him here?

OEDIPUS. That he may win a great profit by doing a small service.

STRANGER. What profit can he get from a blind man?

OEDIPUS. My words shall not be blind.

STRANGER. Attend to what I say, friend. If I can judge by a man's looks and not by his clothes, you are no common man. I would not have you get into trouble. I will send no messenger to the town, but I will say what you have said to the neighbours; and so stay there where I found you until they decide whether you may stay there or not.
[The Stranger goes out.

OEDIPUS. Is that man gone?

ANTIGONE. He is gone: say whatever comes into your head; no ear listens but mine.

OEDIPUS. Dreadful apparitions, Furies, Queens, your shrine is the first in this land at which I have bent my knees; therefore be gracious to me and gracious to the God Phoebus. When he proclaimed my doom, my countless sorrows, the God proclaimed that after many years I should come to a shrine of yours and find there rest, hospitality, and death, and bring good fortune to those that did me good, and ruin upon those that had driven me into wandering. Furthermore, he warned me that thunder and lightning and earthquake would announce my death. If I am not too base for your notice, Queens, I who have borne the worst burden in the world, and if it has been by your guidance, as I think, that I have found this sacred wood, fulfil the words of Phoebus and show me how to bring all to an end. Dear daughters of ancient darkness, and Athens, most honoured among cities, have mercy upon this ghost of Oedipus, upon this ghost, for the man Oedipus is dead, the man men knew.

ANTIGONE. Hush. Some old men are coming, doubtless to ask what we are doing here.

OEDIPUS. I will be silent, but lead me into the wood and away from the road, till we have learnt what their intentions are.

[She leads him into the wood. The Elders of Colonus, the Chorus, enter as if searching for someone. At first there are confused voices, then one man speaks for all. Where the words are in rhyme all may join in the singing.

CHORUS. Where is he gone? Where has he hidden himself? Look
carefully, search every place, for this must be the most insolent man alive.
He must be a foreigner, a man from a distant country.
No native would dare to enter this untrodden wood, profane a spot sacred to the apparitions whose very name we dare not speak.
A shrine which we pass turning our eyes away, and pray to so silently that we dare not even move our lips.

OEDIPUS *[led from his hiding-place by Antigone].* I am the man you are looking for. I can see with the mind's eye but have no other sight.

CHORUS. O! O! Dreadful to look upon!

OEDIPUS. DO not consider me a lawless man.

CHORUS. God protect us! Who is this old man?

OEDIPUS. Not so fortunate a man that you need envy him. This girl lets me walk with her strength and look through her eyes.

CHORUS. Alas! Have you been blind from birth? Your life has indeed been accursed, and as it seems to me long, but do not add a new curse to the other. I can save you from that at any rate. Turn back from there before you have wandered into the silent depths of the wood where the sacred pool is. Come back. Come back. Do you not hear me, road-weary man? If you have anything to say to us, come first out of that forbidden spot, come to some place where it is lawful to speak, but keep silent until you have found it.

OEDIPUS. How shall we answer him, daughter?

ANTIGONE. We must obey the customs of this place, listening to its people, and, as far as we can, doing what they ask.

OEDIPUS. Then give me your hand.

ANTIGONE. I put it into yours.

OEDIPUS. NO one dare touch me while I stand upon this spot.
Promise me, therefore, that when I leave it and put myself into your hands I shall not suffer injury.

CHORUS. We promise that, old man.
[Oedipus begins to move forward and then stops.

OEDIPUS. Further?

CHORUS. Yes, still further.

OEDIPUS. Further yet?

CHORUS. Lead him further yet, lady.

ANTIGONE. Follow me as I lead.

CHORUS. We would have you learn what our people hate that you may hate it also, and what we reverence that you may reverence it also.

OEDIPUS. Lead on, child, to some spot where I may speak and hear, for I would hear what is customary, and so not set myself up against fate.
[Oedipus is brought to a ledge of rock at the edge of the road.

CHORUS. Stay your feet at that edge of rock.

OEDIPUS. Have I gone far enough?

CHORUS. I tell you that is far enough.

OEDIPUS. Shall I sit down?

CHORUS. Move him sideways and put him down on the edge of the rock.

ANTIGONE. This is my work; father, step carefully.
[Oedipus groans.

ANTIGONE. Another step; lean your old body upon my arm.

OEDIPUS. It is a dreadful thing to be blind.
[Antigone seats him upon the rock.

CHORUS. Tell me now, unhappy man, what your name is, in what country you were born, and from what country you come.

OEDIPUS. I am an exile, strangers, but forbear.

CHORUS. From what would you have us forbear, old man?

OEDIPUS. From asking my name, from asking anything.

CHORUS. Why do you say that?

OEDIPUS. My birth was horrible.

CHORUS. YOU must answer.

OEDIPUS *[to Antigone].* My child, what am I to say?

CHORUS. Who was your father, stranger? And of what family?

OEDIPUS. O misery, misery, what will become of me, my child?

ANTIGONE. Speak: necessity compels it.

OEDIPUS. I will speak, if speak I must.

CHORUS. YOU make a great delay between you; come, speak out.

OEDIPUS. I am the son of Laius — *[cry from the Chorus]* and my family the Labdacidae.

CHORUS. O God!

OEDIPUS. And my name Oedipus.

CHORUS. That man!

OEDIPUS. But why should my words make you afraid?
[The Chorus half turn away, cover their eyes with their cloaks, and cry out.

OEDIPUS. Miserable that I am! *[Clamour goes on-]* Daughter, what is going to happen?

CHORUS. Away with you, away out of this land!

OEDIPUS. And your promise? Will you not keep your promise?

CHORUS. The Gods do not punish any man for doing to another what that other has done to him. You knew I did not know your name; you let me promise in ignorance of that, and so I but pay deceit by deceit. Get you gone from this sacred spot, and gone from this neighbourhood before you have brought a curse upon it.

ANTIGONE. Strangers, good honourable men, you will not listen to my father because of what he did against his will, but you should have compassion upon me; there is nothing to set me apart from you! I can still look at you with eyes that might be those of your own kin, and I beseech you that you may have compassion also upon this old man. We come to you in our misery as if you were a
God — no, do not turn away — we scarce dare hope; and yet grant our prayer. I implore you by everything that you hold dear, by wife, by child, by your home, by the God you worship. My father was driven on by a God; how could he help himself?

CHORUS. We pity your father and you his daughter, we pity both alike; you have shared misfortune together: but we dread the anger of the Gods and cannot add anything to what we have already said.

OEDIPUS. It is said that Athens of all the cities of the world has most will and power to succour and protect the exile, but that is fame and therefore

but a breath of wind. You persuaded me to leave the rocky place where none dared touch me that you might drive me from your country. Was that succour and protection? What are you afraid of? What can I do against you? My life has been suffering, not doing. I need not tell you that story of my father and my mother; you know it already: it has put terror into you. But tell me this, how does it prove my nature evil? Even had I struck my father knowingly it would have been in self-defence, and I did it in ignorance; but the men that wronged me knew all that they did. Remember, strangers, that I left under a promise a place where the Gods protected me, and that if you do not keep your promise you do dishonour to those Gods, and the Gods know well how to separate those that do them honour from those that do not, and what man ever made them angry and prospered afterwards? Give the Gods their due, avoid what would blast the fair name of Athens. Do not despise me because my face is maimed and hideous. I came to you as a suppliant, I hold your pledge, fulfil that pledge. To you at any rate I should be sacred; for I can bring luck to all this neighbourhood if I have a mind to. When your master comes, whatever his name be, I shall explain my meaning; and as for the rest, see that you are not treacherous.

CHORUS. YOU have spoken words that fill me with awe. I cannot understand, for they are full of hints and mysteries, but it is for my betters to find out their meaning.

OEDIPUS. Where is your master, strangers?

CHORUS. At Athens, and the messenger who has brought us here has gone to fetch him. We sent him when you named yourself.

OEDIPUS. Do you think that he will come, that he will have respect enough for a blind man to come himself?

CHORUS. Yes, certainly; for he will hear your name. Your name has gone through all countries, and whatever he is doing, resting or working, he will put it aside and come upon the instant.

OEDIPUS. May he act so that he may call down a blessing not upon me alone but upon his city! Only a fool is his own enemy.

ANTIGONE. O God! Can I believe my own eyes? Can I be mistaken?

OEDIPUS. What is it, my child? What is it, Antigone?

ANTIGONE. A girl in a Thessalian sunbonnet upon one of those young horses from Etna. But can it be she, or does my sight deceive me? Is it all my imagination? No, I cannot be certain, but it is, it is; she is waving her hand. She is flinging herself from her horse. She is here.
Enter Ismene

OEDIPUS. What are you saying, child?

ANTIGONE. It is your daughter and my sister, Ismene. You will know in a moment, for she is going to speak.

ISMENE. Father and sister, I had a long search before I found you — you who are more dear to me than anybody in the world, — and now can hardly see because of my tears.

OEDIPUS. YOU have come, my child.

ISMENE. Old man, you have had a dreadful life.

OEDIPUS. But you are here, my child.

ISMENE. Yes, after much toil.

OEDIPUS. Touch me, my daughter.

ISMENE. A hand for both of you.

OEDIPUS. Children — sisters.

ISMENE. Yes, child and sister, a twice wretched life.

OEDIPUS. Her life and mine.

ISMENE. Mine also.

OEDIPUS. Child, what has brought you?

ISMENE. Care for you, father.

OEDIPUS. That you may see me?

ISMENE. Yes, and because there is news that I cannot trust to any mouth but my own.

OEDIPUS. Your brothers might have brought it.

ISMENE. They are — where they are. It is their dark hour.

OEDIPUS. Their dark hour? A true saying, for both in character and in life they are like those Egyptians who send out their wives to earn their daily bread but keep the house themselves. My daughters carry their father's burden while their brothers stay at home in comfort like women. One, since she came into a woman's strength, has been the guide of the old blind man. Often hungry and barefoot, often vexed by rain or summer's heat, often

travel-weary amid waste places; and always that her father might have protection, indifferent to her own comfort. And you, my child, have been my messenger and my watcher, bringing, unknown to the men of Thebes, every oracle that touched upon my fate. And now what news, what message, what oracle have you brought? What words of terror? For you have not come empty-handed.

ISMENE. I went through much before I found you, father, but let that pass, for I will not talk of myself but of the misfortunes that afflict your two sons. I have come to tell you of those misfortunes. At first they had only one thought, to save the city from the curse our family has brought upon it; that it might escape further pollution they made no claim upon the throne but let Creon have it. But now, driven mad by some God or stirred up by their own wickedness, they have both claimed the throne. The younger, and therefore the more excitable of the two, has seized it and driven the elder son Polyneices into banishment; but he, or so it has been rumoured, is in Argos, and has gathered soldiers there. He plans to bring Thebes under the rule of Argos. I have brought you an evil tale, father; when will the Gods have pity upon you?

OEDIPUS. YOU still hope that they will have pity?

ISMENE. Yes, father, I have that hope. There have been new oracles.

OEDIPUS. What are they? What has been foretold that I can fix my hopes upon?

ISMENE. A day will come when the men of Thebes will long for the living man that he may bequeath to them his bones.

OEDIPUS. SO they know it at last, know that I am good still for something.

ISMENE. YOU shall make them strong or weak as you please.

OEDIPUS. I have been made into nothing; am I to be made into a man once more?

ISMENE. Yes, the Gods unmade you and the Gods remake you.

OEDIPUS. A poor gift to a man to abase his youth and exalt his age.

ISMENE. However that may be, Creon is coming to talk of these things and may be here sooner than you think.

OEDIPUS. What brings him, daughter?

ISMENE. To set you somewhere outside the Theban border, yet near enough to be within their power.

OEDIPUS. What good can I do beyond the border?

ISMENE. If an enemy's country possess your bones, they will bring it victory.

OEDIPUS. SO the oracle has spoken at last.

ISMENE. Yes, you must not be your own master, so they will have you for a neighbour but not for a Theban.

OEDIPUS. But if I die in that place, will they bury me in Theban earth?

ISMENE. NO, father, they dread pollution.

OEDIPUS. Then never shall they be my masters.

ISMENE. A day is coming when that shall be a great grief to Thebes.

OEDIPUS. What do you know of that?

ISMENE. They will come in arms and you will blast them from the tomb.

OEDIPUS. Where had you these things, child?

ISMENE. I had them from the messengers of Delphi.

OEDIPUS. Yes; Apollo has said these things?

ISMENE. Men went from Thebes to Delphi and brought back the news.

OEDIPUS. DO my sons know it?

ISMENE. Both. They know it well.

OEDIPUS. Then they are base indeed not to have used the oracle for my recall.

ISMENE. And not to the border but into the city itself.

OEDIPUS. They are afraid of offending; they think more of the kingship and of their struggle for it than of their own father.

ISMENE. Your words fill me with grief, but I cannot contradict you.

OEDIPUS. Then may no God turn them from this war, may spear meet spear till I blast them from the tomb! I shall permit neither the son that now holds the throne to keep his throne, nor the son that is banished to return.

They neither raised up their hands nor their voices to defend me driven out to shame and wandering. Say if you will that when the city drove me out it did the very thing I asked of it. No, I say, no! Upon that first day, when my soul was all in tumult and the dearest wish of my heart was to die, though I were to be stoned to death, no man would grant me my desire; but later on, when a long time had passed, when the tumult in my soul had passed, when I began to feel that in my anger against myself I had asked for punishments beyond my deserts, the city drove me out. My sons, who might have hindered, did nothing, though one word could have changed everything, and I their father was driven out to wander through my whole life as a beggar and an outcast. I owe my daily bread and whatever I have found of care and shelter to my daughters, to these two girls.
Their brothers have preferred the mob's favour; yes, they have trafficked with it and bartered away their father for throne and sceptre. Never, never shall Oedipus be ally of one or the other, never shall the throne of Thebes be lucky to one or the other. I meditate upon the new prophecies the girl has brought, and when I speak, Phoebus Apollo speaks. Nor shall I help the men of Thebes whether it be Creon that they send or any other that may be great amongst them. But, strangers, if you are willing to help, if these Dreadful Goddesses are willing, I shall deliver your country from all its enemies.

CHORUS. Who could refuse compassion to Oedipus and his daughters? — and you have added another claim upon us, that you can deliver this country. Yet I have advice to give, and you shall be the better for it.

OEDIPUS. Advise me, sir, and whatever that advice be I shall take it.

CHORUS. Make prayer and atonement to the Dark Goddesses, for you have trespassed upon their ground.

OEDIPUS. How shall I go about it, stranger?

CHORUS. Draw water from the spring well over there.

OEDIPUS. And when I have drawn the water?

CHORUS. There are three bowls made by a famous potter.

OEDIPUS. Yes; what must I do?

CHORUS. Pour out three streams of water, facing to the spot where the sun rises.

OEDIPUS. A stream from each bowl?

CHORUS. Yes; and be careful to empty the last bowl completely.

OEDIPUS. And when the earth has drunk it?

CHORUS. Put three times nine sprays from an olive-tree upon that earth, and pray.

OEDIPUS. What are the words that I must say? That is what chiefly matters.

CHORUS. Remind them to be good to suppliants, seeing that they are called the Good People, and then pray for whatever you most need, but do not move your lips, or if you move your lips do not permit them to make

any sound, and having prayed come from the place without looking behind you. Do this, and I will help you all I can.

OEDIPUS. These are men of the neighbourhood, daughters; you have heard them.

ANTIGONE. We have heard them; what would you have us do?

OEDIPUS. I cannot go, for I have neither sight nor strength, but let one of you two go, for I think that one can perform a rite of this kind. If it be done with goodwill, one can make an atonement for ten thousand men. Go quickly, but one must remain here, for I am helpless without a guide.

ISMENE. I will go. I will perform the rite, but where shall I find the spot? Direct me.

CHORUS. On the further side of the wood, lady, and there is a custodian of the shrine who has everything that you will want.

ISMENE. Take care of our father, Antigone, until I return.
[She goes.

CHORUS. It is a terrible thing, stranger, to stir that old grief of yours, but there are things I long to know.

OEDIPUS. Must I tell all again?

CHORUS. I am thinking of that heavy sorrow, that sorrow for which there is no cure, of all that heavy burden which you have borne.

OEDIPUS. You should be too considerate to probe into my shame; am I not your guest?

CHORUS. I only speak of it because that tale has gone everywhere. I would know the true facts.

OEDIPUS. O misery!

CHORUS. Do not deny me.

OEDIPUS. Misery! Misery!

CHORUS. I have answered all your questions.

OEDIPUS. Every misfortune that I have suffered came from what I did in ignorance. I swear to God that I did nothing of my own will.

CHORUS. HOW did that come about?

OEDIPUS. Thebes gave me the wife that brought the curse upon me.
I knew nothing.

CHORUS. IS it true then that you lay with your own mother?

OEDIPUS. O misery! For you have spoken words that are cruel as death, and those two girls that I begot —

CHORUS. What is it that you say?

OEDIPUS. Those two daughters, those two curses.

CHORUS. O God!

OEDIPUS. The womb that bore me bore them also.

CHORUS. They are at once your children and —

OEDIPUS. My children and my sisters!

CHORUS. O horror!

OEDIPUS. Horror indeed, every horror has again swept back upon me; my soul is drowned.

CHORUS. You have suffered.

OEDIPUS. Suffered dreadful things.

CHORUS. But you have sinned.

OEDIPUS. Sinned without knowledge.

CHORUS. I do not understand.

OEDIPUS. I tell you that Thebes gave her to me. Would that I had never served that city, never been rewarded by it, miserable that I am.

CHORUS. But that is not all the tale; there was somebody that you killed.

OEDIPUS. So you must still question?

CHORUS. YOU killed your own father!

OEDIPUS. Another stab! Have I not suffered enough?

CHORUS. You killed him!

OEDIPUS. Yes; but I can plead —

CHORUS. What can you plead?

OEDIPUS. And plead justly.

CHORUS. And what can you plead?

OEDIPUS. That those whom I slew would have taken my own life, and that therefore I am innocent before the law. No evil intent brought me into this misery.

CHORUS. Our King Theseus comes, summoned by the messenger.
Theseus, son of Aegeus, will hear and judge all that you have to say.
Enter Theseus

THESEUS. Son of Laius, I have long known you by hearsay and of the cruel putting out of your eyes, and now you stand visible before me, a ragged man with a disfigured face. I am full of compassion, Oedipus; I have come to find out why you have taken up your stand in this place, you and this luckless girl, and what you would ask of Athens and of myself? I will not refuse it, for I myself have been in exile, nor has any living man been in greater peril of his life than I. Never will I reject such a wanderer; what am I but a man, and I may suffer to-morrow what you suffer to-day.

OEDIPUS. Theseus, you have put great nobleness into a few words, and why should I speak many words? You have named me aright and named my father aright, and you know from what land I come; I will say what I must and so finish the tale.

THESEUS. Say it, for I am all ears.

OEDIPUS. I offer you as a gift this battered body; though hideous to look upon, it brings a blessing greater than beauty.

THESEUS. What blessing?

OEDIPUS. That you shall know later.

THESEUS. But the blessing? When does it come?

OEDIPUS. When I am dead and you have given me a grave.

THESEUS. That is the last gift of all, the last service hands can do. Is there nothing that you would have between this and then?

OEDIPUS. Nothing. Give me that and I have all the rest.

THESEUS. This is a trifling thing you ask.

OEDIPUS. It is no trifling thing. Weigh well what you do; it will stir up rancour.

THESEUS. What? Between your sons and me?

OEDIPUS. Yes, and before you bury me.

THESEUS. HOW could that be?

OEDIPUS. They may come to carry me to Thebes.

THESEUS. But if they come, why remain in exile?

OEDIPUS. When I would, they would not.

THESEUS. It is folly to make ill-fortune worse by temper.

OEDIPUS. Blame me when you have heard my story, not before.

THESEUS. Speak. I would not blame you from ignorance.

OEDIPUS. I have suffered an unheard-of wrong.

THESEUS. YOU mean that ancient misery?

OEDIPUS. NO. Who in all Hellas but knows that?

THESEUS. What new grief is this that no man has seen the like of?

OEDIPUS. I have been driven from my country by my own children, banished by them as my father's murderer.

THESEUS. Then why should they come to fetch you?

OEDIPUS. Compelled by an oracle from the God.

THESEUS. Because of some misfortune it foretells?

OEDIPUS. That they shall be conquered if they do not, conquered by Athens.

THESEUS. Why should Thebes and Athens fight? What can disturb the friendship between myself and Thebes?

OEDIPUS. Friendly son of Aegeus, the Gods neither grow old nor die, but all else is subject to change. Bodily strength and earth's fertility decay, man's trust in man dies out and enmity takes its place. Not even the best of friends can keep in the same mood toward one another, nor can city toward city, for be it soon or late men find the bitter better than the sweet, and then again, it may be, turn to the sweet. All is sweet to-day between Thebes and you, but the known goes and the unknown comes in its stead, and men take

to the spear for any trifle. My body shall be asleep and buried, and yet, if Phoebus, son of God, spoke truth and God be God, it shall, though cold in death, drink hot Theban blood. But these are mysteries I may not speak. Ask no more. I end the tale where I began it — do that which you have promised and you shall not, unless the God has cheated me, make Oedipus welcome and get nothing in return.

CHORUS. From the first moment, King, he has promised this or some like thing.

THESEUS. Who would reject the friendship of such a man? His house and mine are ancient allies, he promises great gifts to our city, and he is the suppliant of the Gods. I cannot refuse what he asks. I admit his claim and establish him as citizen amongst us. Whatever choice you make, Oedipus, whether to remain here under the protection of these men or to live with me in my own house, your will shall be my will.

OEDIPUS. The blessing of God upon such men as this!

THESEUS. What is your decision? Will you come into my house?

OEDIPUS. I would were it lawful — but this is the place.

THESEUS. The place for what? I will not thwart you —

OEDIPUS. TO vanquish those that drove me out, and to blast them from the ground.

THESEUS. Your presence may bring us a great destiny.

OEDIPUS. It shall — if you keep faith.

THESEUS. Have no fear of that — I shall not fail you.

OEDIPUS. I will not bind you with an oath as we bind unworthy men.

THESEUS. YOU would have gained nothing if you had; my word is my oath.

OEDIPUS. What will you do? How will you keep faith?

THESEUS. What do you fear?

OEDIPUS. Men will come.

THESEUS. There are those here who will see to that.

OEDIPUS. Beware — for if you leave me —

THESEUS. It is not for you to teach me my business.

OEDIPUS. My fear drives me on.

THESEUS. I see nothing to be afraid of.

OEDIPUS. YOU do not know what they have threatened.

THESEUS. Let these Thebans threaten as they will, there shall be foul weather between the threat and the act. Be of good courage. If
God sent you hither, you need no protection of mine, but God or no God my mere name will protect.
[Theseus goes out.

CHORUS.

Come praise Colonus' horses, and come praise
The wine-dark of the wood's intricacies,
The nightingale that deafens daylight there,
If daylight ever visit where,
Unvisited by tempest or by sun,
Immortal ladies tread the ground
Dizzy with harmonious sound,

Semele's lad a gay companion.
And yonder in the gymnasts' garden thrives
The self-sown, self-begotten shape that gives
Athenian intellect its mastery,
Even the grey-leaved olive-tree
Miracle-bred out of the living stone;
Nor accident of peace nor war
Shall wither that old marvel, for
The great grey-eyed Athena stares thereon.

Who comes into this country, and has come
Where golden crocus and narcissus bloom,
Where the Great Mother, mourning for her daughter
And beauty-drunken by the water
Glittering among grey-leaved olive-trees,
Has plucked a flower and sung her loss;
Who finds abounding Cephisus
Has found the loveliest spectacle there is.
Because this country has a pious mind

And so remembers that when all mankind
But trod the road, or splashed about the shore,
Poseidon gave it bit and oar,
Every Colonus lad or lass discourses
Of that oar and of that bit;
Summer and winter, day and night,
Of horses and horses of the sea, white horses.

ANTIGONE. O country that all men praise, the time has come to pay for praise.

OEDIPUS. Why do you say that? What has happened, daughter?

ANTIGONE. TO pay with deeds — Creon approaches, with many at his heels.

OEDIPUS. Kind old men, prove that I am safe indeed.

CHORUS. You shall have that proof. Put away all fear; though age has robbed me of my strength my country is as strong as ever.
Enter Creon with attendants

CREON. Sirs, worthy countrymen, my coming has alarmed you; I can see it by your eyes. Why do you shrink away? I have no hostile purpose. I come, an old man, to the strongest city in all Greece; I come, old as I am, to persuade that man there to return to Thebes. And I have been sent, not by any one man, but by the whole people, chosen for this embassy since being of his own blood I mourn for his misfortune as no other Theban can. Hear me, luckless Oedipus, come home. All the people call you hither, and I in chief, because I would be the basest of men if it did not grieve me more

than it can any other to see you standing there, old man, a stranger and a wanderer, and to think that you have gone, one woman for attendant, hither and thither in beggary; and never did I think to see that woman sunk into such a state of misery, chained to your blindness and your penury, and she a ripe unmarried girl at every brute's mercy. That such a thing should be is a public scandal, a shame that affects me and all our family. End this shame, Oedipus, by returning to your native city and to the house of your fathers; say goodbye in all friendship to this land, worthy though it be, for your own land has the first claim since you were born and bred there.

OEDIPUS. Audacity, professing the highest motives that you may deceive! You would carry me away bound and shackled to that very place where captivity would be the most bitter. In old days, driven mad by all the evil that I had brought upon myself, I cried out that you should cast me out of the land, but you were deaf and would not grant me what I asked; and when the violence of grief had passed and the seclusion of the house grown dear to me, then, then it was that you cast me from the house and from the land. You did not remember that I was of your blood, but now you remember it. Now that I have been welcomed by Athens and her children you would drag me away, covering up your purpose with specious words. What good is kindness done against our will? If a man gave no help in need, no gift when you asked it, but offered help and gift when you had no need of either, would you take pleasure in that man? Or thank him? Yet that is what you offer me, and, therefore, though it looks good it is evil. I will tell you what that evil is and prove how false you are. You have come to fetch me, but not that you may take me home, but to plant me somewhere on the borders that you may keep me in your power and therefore escape defeat in war, defeat from this land. But you shall not escape, that shall not be your portion, but this — the vengeance of my ghost; and for my two sons this heritage, a

place in Thebes where they may die, a place in my kingdom just large enough for that. What do you know of the fortune of that kingdom? But I know it. My knowledge comes from Phoebus and his father God most high, aye, from truth itself, while you have come with fraudulent lips and between them a tongue like a sword; yet plead however you may, you shall not gain your case. What is the use of words? No words of mine can alter you. Get you gone; she and I live where we have chosen, and no matter what a plight we are in, our life, so long as we are contented with it, shall not be altogether wretched.

CREON. Whom has this debate made the more wretched? You who injure yourself thereby, or me that you have injured?

OEDIPUS. I am well content with your part in it, for you have moved neither me nor these that stand beside us.

CREON. DO you want everybody to know, miserable man, that age has not brought you sense? Do you want to make yourself a byword?

OEDIPUS. Your tongue is too ready to be honest.

CREON. And you speak many words and nothing to the point.

OEDIPUS. And yours, it seems, are to the point and few.

CREON. Who could speak to the point that had you for a listener?

OEDIPUS. Begone, I tell you to be gone, in my own name, and in the name of these others. And stop spying upon me in this place where I am predestined to remain.

CREON. These others will bear me out in what I have said, and as to the answer that you have sent to your own kith and kin, if ever I take you —

OEDIPUS. Can you take me in spite of these?

CREON. NO need to take you; I can make you smart enough without that.

OEDIPUS. NO matter how you bluster, what can you do?

CREON. One of your daughters has been seized and sent hence, and now I shall seize the other and send her after.

OEDIPUS. O misery!

CREON. You shall be more miserable yet.

OEDIPUS. YOU have taken my child.

CREON. And I shall take this one in a moment.

OEDIPUS. What will you do to help me, friends? Will you forsake me, or will you drive away this godless man?

CHORUS. Get you gone, stranger; you have done a most wicked act and plan another.

CREON *[to his attendants*]. Take that girl by force if she will not come of her own will.

ANTIGONE. What am I to do, miserable that I am? Where shall I find help from Gods or men?

CHORUS [*To Creon].* What are you doing, stranger?

CREON. I will not touch that man, but his daughter is mine.

OEDIPUS. Worthy old men —

CHORUS. Stranger, what you do is unjust.

CREON. NO. Just.

CHORUS. HOW can it be just?

CREON. I take one of my own kin.
[Lays his hand on Antigone.

OEDIPUS. Hear me, Athens!

CHORUS. Be careful, stranger, let her go. We shall soon find out whether you or we are the stronger.
[They gather round him, threatening.

CREON. Stand back.

CHORUS. We shall not stand back unless you change your mind.

CREON. If you injure me it will be war between Thebes and Athens.

OEDIPUS. War. I said so.

CHORUS. Take your hands from that girl.

CREON. YOU are not the master here.

CHORUS. Leave hold, I tell you.

CREON *[to one of his guards who seizes Antigone].* Take her and begone.

CHORUS. TO the rescue, men of Colonus, to the rescue! The might of Athens is insulted. Help! Help!

ANTIGONE. They are dragging me away — friends — friends —

OEDIPUS *[blindly seeking for her].* Where are you, my child?

ANTIGONE. They are dragging me away.

OEDIPUS. Your hands, my child.

ANTIGONE. I am helpless.

CREON *[to his guards].* Away with you.

OEDIPUS. O misery!
[Guards go out with Antigone.

CREON. Never will those two crutches prop your steps again. It is your will to ruin friends and country, and I can do nothing to prevent you. I though a prince have been their messenger, and I have failed, but you have done yourself no good in giving way to anger, and you will know that in times to come. You have always given yourself up to anger, no friend could ever turn you from it, and that has been your curse.
[He turns to follow his guard.

CHORUS. Stop! Stop!

CREON. Hands off!

CHORUS. YOU shall not go until those two girls have been given back.

CREON. Then I shall take what is, it seems, dearer to Athens than those two girls.

CHORUS. What are you planning now?

CREON. TO take that man there captive.

CHORUS. A brave threat!

CREON. It shall be made a deed upon the instant.

CHORUS. Yes, unless the King of this country intervenes.

OEDIPUS. Will you dare to touch me?

CREON. Be silent.

OEDIPUS. NO, no, but by permission of the powers of this place I speak yet one more curse. Wretch, I am blind, and you have taken by force the unhappy creature who gave me sight. Therefore I call upon the Sun-God that sees all things, to give you an old age like mine.

CREON. Hear him, men of Colonus.

OEDIPUS. They hear both you and me, and they know that my wrongs can strike, that my revenge shall not be in words.

CREON. Then I will do what I threatened; alone and slow with age though I am, I will take that man by force.
[Approaches Oedipus to seize him.

OEDIPUS. O misfortune!

CHORUS. YOU are a foolhardy man to think that you can do it.

CREON. I think it.

CHORUS. If you do it there is no such city as Athens.

CREON. Even a weak man is strong in a good cause.

OEDIPUS. Hear what he is saying.

CHORUS. Let him say what he likes. He cannot do it, by God, he cannot.

CREON. What do you know of God?

CHORUS. Insolence!

CREON. Insolence that you must put up with.
Enter Theseus

THESEUS. What is this quarrel? What is the trouble? High words have reached me at the altar of the Sea-God, the patron saint of your own Colonus. Speak out — you have interrupted the sacrifice.

OEDIPUS. Friend, I know your voice. That man there has done me a foul wrong.

THESEUS. What wrong? What man? Speak out.

OEDIPUS. The man that is before your eyes — Creon. He has taken my children from me, all that I had.

THESEUS. What is that you say?

OEDIPUS. My tale is finished.

THESEUS *[to his attendants*]. Let one of you run to the altars, bid every one to leave the sacrifice and hurry to the cross-roads, whether upon foot or upon horseback. Let the horsemen ride with a loose rein, for if they do not get there before the girls I shall be made a mockery. Away, away. *[Turning to Creon-]* As for this man, if I had not kept a tight hold upon myself he would already have had something to remember me by, but it is better to deal out to him the law that he dealt out to Oedipus. *[To Creon-}* You shall not leave this country until you have brought back those girls and set them there in my sight, for what you have done is a disgrace to me and to my people as it is to you and to your people. You have come to a city that observes justice, that does all things according to the law, and you have set aside the laws of that city, taken captives at your own pleasure, taken what you wanted by violence, as though my city were uninhabited, or inhabited by slaves, and I a mere nothing. Thebes never taught you this — her men are honourable — nor would Thebes approve an act of robbery against me, nor that you should commit an act of robbery against the Gods, and carry away their suppliants. Do you suppose that I, if I trod your soil, would take anything without licence from its ruler, even if my claim were of all claims the most just? I know better how to deport myself among the people of another nation. But you who are old and should have learnt wisdom, you have brought disgrace upon an honourable city. I therefore repeat, unless those girls are brought to me you shall remain here, a captive in their stead, and do not think what I say mere words, for I say them with my whole heart and soul.

CHORUS. Think where you stand, stranger; you come of a just race, but your actions have been weighed and they are unjust.

CREON. I have done what I have done, not because I thought this city lacked law, lacked men for its defence, as you have declared, but because I did not believe that its people were so much in love with my own kindred that they would keep them against my will. I thought they would not protect a parricide, a pollution, a man who had taken his own mother to wife. That is why I dared to act, nor had I done so even then, but that he called down curses upon my people and upon myself. I thought I could requite such wrong. Only the dead are free from anger, and anger does not grow less as a man grows old. I have a just cause, but I am in your power, so do what you think right, and yet remember that however old I may be I can requite one deed with another.

OEDIPUS. DO such taunts disgrace most the man at whom they are aimed or the man that makes them? All that I am taunted with, parricide, incest, misery, I have borne indeed, but by no choice of mine, but at the pleasure of the Gods. Set me apart from these acts, apart from all that they, enraged, it may be, against my ancestors, have made me do against my family and myself, and there is nobody can accuse me of anything. They settled before my birth all that I was to do. The oracle had announced that my father was to die by the hand of his son. How then can I be blamed? I met my father not knowing who he was, and killed him not knowing what I did, but misery is not guilt. Are you not ashamed to have spoken of my mother, and to make me speak of my marriage with her, seeing that she was your own sister? You drive me to shameless speech and speak I must, whether I will or no — Misery! Misery! She was my mother indeed, and a mother bore children to her son, but one thing is plain as day, that what we did we did

unknowingly, but that you knowingly have reviled her and me. You throw all that has happened in my teeth, and yet no man can judge me guilty either of that marriage or of my father's death. Answer this one question — if an armed man were to start up before you now, would you out of your righteousness ask before you drew to defend yourself if he were, perchance, your father? I think that you would have at him without further words and not search here and there to find the rights of it, seeing that you love your life. Yet that was how it was with me; into that dilemma had the Gods led me. If my father could come back to life he would not contradict what I have said. Yet you in a frenzy of speech, not caring what you say or do not say, have accused me, and before these strangers. You began with flattery, praising Theseus and Athens for their justice, and then when you could not get your way showed how little you thought of that justice by stealing my daughters and by laying your hands on me, yes, upon the old man and the suppliant. And therefore I call upon those Goddesses whom this land worships to fight upon my side, and I call upon this land that you may learn what men serve it.

CHORUS. King, he is a good man though under a curse, and worthy of our help.

THESEUS. Enough of words; the doers of the wrong are in flight and we do nothing.

CREON. Well, what would you have me do? I am in your power.

THESEUS. Bring me to the girls if near at hand, put me upon their track if your men have carried them away. They will never cross the border. Come, set out, for the robber has been robbed and the hunter taken in the net. I will see to it that no accomplice helps you. I am very certain that you would

never have dared to commit this outrage without some treachery among my people. If you have any wits you will pay more attention to my words than you paid to the warnings these others spoke a while back.

CREON. You are in your own country, say what you will, but when I get home to mine I shall know how to act.

THESEUS. Threaten if you have a fancy for it, but set out. Oedipus, stay here in peace, be satisfied with this pledge: I shall bring those children or die attempting it.

OEDIPUS. May Heaven reward you, Theseus, for you are a noble and faithful man.
[Theseus, Creon, and attendants go out.

CHORUS.
Would I were there when they turn and Theban robbers face,
Amid the brazen roar of shields, Colonus in chase;
Whether by the Pythian strand, or further away to the west
Where immortal spirits reveal the life of the blessed
To the living man that has sworn to let none living know;
Or it may be north and west amid Oea's desolate snow.
No matter how steep the climb Colonus follows the track;
No matter how loose the rein Theseus rides at their back;
And the captives turn in the saddle, turn their heads at his call.
Swords upon brazen shields and brazen helmets fall.
Creon is captured or slain, many are captured or slain.
Terrible the men of Colonus, terrible Theseus' men.
O glitter of bridle and bit; O lads in company
To the son of Rhea that rides upon the horses of the sea

Vowed, and to the Goddess Pallas Athena vowed!
O that I had seen it all mounted upon a cloud!
0 — O — that I had run thither, a bird upon the wind!
1 — I have but imagined it all, seen it in the eye of the mind,
And cannot know what happened for all the words I say,
And therefore to God's daughter Pallas Athena pray
To bring the lads and the horses and the luckless ladies home,
And when that prayer is finished that a double blessing come
From the running ground of the deer, from the mountain land to this,
Pray to the brother and sister, Apollo and Artemis.

CHORUS. I have not raised false hopes. The men return with your daughters in the midst of them.

OEDIPUS. Where? Where? What is that you say?
Enter Antigone, Ismene, Theseus, and attendants

ANTIGONE. O father, father! that God would restore your sight that you might see how noble a man stands there!

OEDIPUS. My child, so you have come back to me.

ANTIGONE. Yes, thanks to the strong arms of Theseus and his men.

OEDIPUS. Come to me, children; let me embrace you. I never thought to have touched you with my hands again.

ANTIGONE. We come, for we too long to embrace you.

OEDIPUS. Where are you?

ANTIGONE. Here, approaching you together.

OEDIPUS. My darlings — props of my old age.

ANTIGONE. We three are under the same curse.

OEDIPUS. I draw my darlings to me, and now should I die I shall not be altogether wretched since you have come to me again. Come closer on either side, children; cling to your father; rest, for you are tired out after all that has happened. Tell me of it all; but no, you are young girls and so afraid to speak before such a crowd as this.

ANTIGONE. There is nothing we need say, for our deliverer is there, and he can tell you all.

OEDIPUS. DO not wonder, sir, that I have so much to say to these children lost and found when hope itself seemed lost. I have not forgotten that by you and you alone were they rescued. May the
Gods give you all the good that I wish, give it to you and to this land, for through you and through you alone, and here alone, here in this one place out of the whole world, have I found truth and piety and justice, and I have nothing to give you in return but words. Stretch out your hand towards me that I may take it in mine and kiss you upon the cheek. But what am I saying? I am miserable and sinful and polluted. I would not have you touch me; no, no, I dare not permit it even if you would. No one may touch me but those that lie under the same curse. Take my greeting there where you stand, and be as favourable in the future as in this hour.

THESEUS. What more natural than to dwell upon your joy and speak of it to these children; what more natural than to think of these before you

thought of me? My fame comes from what I do and not from the words of any man. Your daughters are there; I have carried out my promise, old man, and all those threats came to nothing; they will tell you all in good time, for I will tell no tale and make no boast. But as I returned here something happened that I must speak of and get your advice about, for though no great matter in itself I do not know what it may mean.

OEDIPUS. What is it, son of Aegeus? For I have heard nothing of it.

THESEUS. When the noise of the quarrel with Creon reached me I was sacrificing at the altar of Poseidon, and as I brought your daughters hither I passed that altar and there I found a man who was, they told me, a kinsman of yours, though not your countryman.

OEDIPUS. Of what country? What does he want?

THESEUS. I know nothing but this one thing: he wants to speak with you, but as he promises to be brief it will not trouble you much.

OEDIPUS. What brings him? A man does not go to the altar of Poseidon about nothing.

THESEUS. All that he has asked of the God is that he may speak with you and return home uninjured.

OEDIPUS. But who can this man be?

THESEUS. He is of Argos. Have you a kinsman there?

OEDIPUS. DO not plead for that man, King.

THESEUS. What ails you?

OEDIPUS. DO not ask me.

THESEUS. Ask what?

OEDIPUS. I know that suppliant.

THESEUS. But what has he done that I should not plead for him?

OEDIPUS. My son, the hateful son whose voice would vex me more than that of any living man.

THESEUS. Are you afraid that he will persuade you to something against your will? It can do you no harm to hear what he has to say.

OEDIPUS. The voice of that son is hateful to his father; do not compel me to give way.

THESEUS. Remember that he is a suppliant to the God and that you have a duty to the God.

ANTIGONE. Father, let me speak, though I am too young to advise anyone. Do what the King asks, seeing that he asks it for his own sake and that of the God, and let my brother come. He cannot force you to anything against your will, nor will he be able to deceive you. It is far more likely that he will betray his own foolish plan. What harm, therefore, can come of hearing what he has to say? You are his father, and no matter what wrongs he may do against you, you must not wrong him in return. Let him come. Other men have been driven to anger by evil children and have been none the worse when friends have talked away their anger. Turn your eyes from the present moment; think of all the evils that have come upon you through your own father and mother; think what you did in your anger against your

own father and against your own sight. What good ever came of intemperate anger? Give way because we all ask it of you. It is not right to receive a favour and give nothing in return, nor to keep a suppliant waiting.

OEDIPUS. What you have asked goes bitterly against the grain, my child, but let it be as you will. But promise me this, my friend, that if this man comes hither neither he nor any other shall be put over me as a master.

THESEUS. NO need to ask that, old man. I will not boast, but you may be certain that while God keeps me in the world no man shall be put over you as a master.
[Theseus goes out.

CHORUS.
Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span;

Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged man;

Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be vain.
Even from that delight memory treasures so,

Death, despair, division of families, all entanglements of mankind grow,

As that old wandering beggar and these God-hated children know.
In the long echoing street the laughing dancers throng,
The bride is carried to the bridegroom's chamber through torchlight and tumultuous song;
I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long.
Never to have lived is best, ancient writers say;
Never to have drawn the breath of life, never to have looked into the eye of

day;
The second best's a gay goodnight and quickly turn away.

ANTIGONE. Father, I can see the suppliant coming, a man without attendants, the tears pouring from his eyes.

OEDIPUS. Who is he?

ANTIGONE. The man who was in your thoughts from the first — Polyneices.
Polyneices enters

POLYNEICES. What shall I do or say? Must I mourn first for my own sorrow or first for my father, for that man there, that man lost among strangers, you two his only friends, his eyeballs blind, his clothing in squalid rags, his hair tossed by the wind, and his food — Heaven knows what scraps — in that old wallet. That is how I find him. I know now — now that it is too late — that I have proved myself, father, by neglect of you, the basest of living men. I proclaim it aloud, admit all that I am. And yet Mercy is the Queen of Heaven, and wherever God goes Mercy goes at His side, and that emboldens me to pray that she may stand at your side also. I have committed a great wrong, and yet all may be set right again. [A *pause.]* Why do you keep silent? Speak, father: do not turn away; will you not even answer? Will you drive me away with a contempt so great that you will not even explain why you are angry? Do what you can, sisters, to make our father speak to me; persuade him not to drive me away without even an answer.
Remind him that I have come from the altar of the God.

ANTIGONE. Say why you come, my unhappy brother, for words full of emotion, joy, anger, tenderness, whatever it is, can move a dumb man and make him speak.

POLYNEICES. I will tell everything — you have given me good advice; but first put myself under the God's protection. The King of this country brought me from the altar and promised that I should say whatever I had to say and suffer no wrong thereby, and I appeal to those here, to those who are strangers, and to my father and to my sisters, not to dishonour the King's word. And now, father, I will say what brings me here. I have been driven into exile, driven out of my own country, because being your eldest son I had claimed the throne. Eteocles, though younger than I, drove me into exile, though he neither worsted me in battle nor won the people from me by any sound argument. His cajolery and intrigue prevailed against me because of the curse that is upon your house; so at least do I think, and so I have been told by the oracle. And I am the more certain because when I reached Argos all went well.
I married the daughter of Adrastus, lately King there, gathered about me seven companies of spearmen, and all the men most famous in war, and all sworn to die or drive out my enemies. But why have I come? I come to entreat you, father, in my own name and in that of my allies. Seven leaders, each with his troop of spearmen, gathering against Thebes. Amphiaraus, incomparable in war and divination alike; Tydeus the Aetolian; Eteoclus of Argos; Hippomedon, sent by Talaos his father; Capaneus, who boasts that he will burn Thebes to the ground; Parthenopaeus of
Arcadia, son of Atalanta; and last of the seven, I, the son of Oedipus, but no, not his, but son of an accursed destiny. We seven who beleaguer Thebes and lead the men of Argos implore, pray, and beseech you. Remember your own children, remember your own exile, and turn away your anger. Do not

let your anger follow when I march against the brother who has driven me out and stolen my inheritance. For victory, if truth be in the oracles, shall be with that party that you favour, and upon whatever side you claim to be your own. So by the Gods and by the founders of our race, I ask that you favour our party and our side. I too am a beggar and an exile — you and I eat the bread of strangers, and share a common doom, while he reigns as King, and strutting in our house mocks us both alike. With you to help, I shall conquer without toil or delay, and thereupon, my brother driven out, establish myself upon the throne and you in your own house once more. Favour our party, all shall be accomplished, but if you do not I shall not even return alive.

CHORUS. Remember the man that brought him hither, Oedipus; say something, speak, speak to your son before you send him away.

OEDIPUS. If I did not remember that Theseus brought him and begged me to speak, I would not speak a word. But now he shall hear words that shall bring no comfort to his heart, and after that let him be gone. Villain, when you had the throne that your brother has taken, when you had the sceptre in your own hand, you drove me into exile, you made me a nationless man, aye, clapped these rags upon my back. And now that you are driven out in your turn you cannot look upon these rags without tears, but the time for tears is past. I bear my burden while I live, and while I live think you my murderer, for it was you that sent me wandering and begging for my bread. And but for these, these daughters, my nurses and preservers, these girls that have the strength of a man, I had been dead by now. But you and your brother are strangers and no sons of mine. Therefore the eye of God has seen you; punishment has begun, but it shall not ruin you utterly until your army marches upon Thebes. You shall not overthrow that city. No, but you

shall fall and your brother fall, each drowned in the other's blood. I have called down that curse upon you, and now I call upon God that you may learn before your death what it is to mock a blind father. These are good, they are different, altogether different. But you, throne and supplication alike, are in the power of my curse, if indeed God's justice exists and his eternal law. Begone with my abhorrence, son that I have made no son, vilest of the vile, begone, orphan, begone, carry my curses away — all that I have called down upon your head. Never shall you vanquish your own country, your own kin, never shall you return to Argos among its hills, but find your death at the hand of kin and kill the man that gives that death, aye, kill the brother that drove you out of Thebes. And I call on the ancestral Night, I, the blind man, to gather you into itself, I call upon the spirits of this place and I call upon that power that has put such fearful hatred between brother and brother, I call upon the destroying God himself. Go, carry away these words in your ears; publish them abroad that the men of Thebes and your faithful allies may know that Oedipus pays as much honour to the one son as to the other.

CHORUS. Get you gone: as I do not approve of your plottings I cannot wish you good luck.

POLYNEICES. I mourn for my lost hope and for my useless journey, and I mourn for my comrades. What an end to all our plans; little did we think it when we marched from Argos. Misery, misery; such an end that I dare not speak of it to any, but must go in silence to this doom. Promise, you who are my sisters though his daughters, that if our father's curses be fulfilled, and if you be recalled to Thebes, you will give me fitting burial. Promise that my body suffer no dishonour; be praised among men for a double service — that done to a father, that done to a brother.

ANTIGONE. One thing I entreat of you, Polyneices.

POLYNEICES. What is it, dear Antigone?

ANTIGONE. Order your army back to Argos. Do not destroy yourself and Thebes.

POLYNEICES. NO, it is impossible; I never could lead that army again once it were known that I had blenched.

ANTIGONE. SO you would lead it again — why rage against Thebes? If you destroy your native city at last, how will you be the better?

POLYNEICES. It is shameful to be an exile, an elder brother mocked at by a younger.

ANTIGONE. Then it is you that make all certain, you that bring about the fulfilment of his prophecies, the killing of a brother by a brother.

POLYNEICES. Yes, that is what he wants, but I must not yield.

ANTIGONE. Alas! Alas! But who dare follow you when he has heard the prophecy?

POLYNEICES. He will never hear it; no good leader brings bad news.

ANTIGONE. SO, then, my brother, your decision is taken?

POLYNEICES. Yes, taken. Do not delay me further. Henceforth I run my race followed by demons and my father's curse; but I call down God's blessing upon you, my sister, if after my death you do my will, for while I

live I am beyond your help. Take away your arms. Good-bye, sisters, for never will you look again upon my living body.

ANTIGONE. Alas!

POLYNEICES. DO not mourn for me.

ANTIGONE. Who would not mourn you, brother, hurrying away to a foreknown death?

POLYNEICES. How can I help it if I am fated to die?

ANTIGONE. No, no; hear me, I beseech.

POLYNEICES. You waste breath.

ANTIGONE. If wasted, then indeed am I wretched, for I must lose you.

POLYNEICES. Fortune will decide, but I pray to God that only good fortune attend you two, for there is not a man in the world but knows that you deserve it.
[He goes out.

CHORUS.
What is this portent? What does it shadow forth?

Have Heaven and Earth in dreadful marriage lain?
What shall the allotted season bring to birth?
This blind old ragged, rambling beggar-man
Calls curses upon cities, upon the great,
And scatters at his pleasure rich estate.
[Thunder.

CHORUS. What an uproar! God protect us!

OEDIPUS. My children, my children, if there is any man who can be sent, send to Theseus and summon him hither.

ANTIGONE. Why should he be summoned, father?

OEDIPUS. God's winged thunder comes to lead me down to Hades; send for him, send for him upon the instant.
[A *second peal of thunder.*

CHORUS.
Thunder has stirred the hair upon my head.

What horror comes to birth? What shall be found,
That travail finished, on the lowly bed?
Never in vain the dreadful thunder sounds,
Nor can the living lightning flash in vain;
Heaven has borne a child and shrieks from pain.

OEDIPUS. Daughters, your father comes to his predestined end; he can no more turn away his face.

ANTIGONE. HOW do you know it? What have you heard or seen?

OEDIPUS. Enough that I know it. Let a man go quickly and bring the lord of this country.
[Thunder.

CHORUS.
Once more that dreadful sound. God pity us

When all is finished on the bed of earth,
Nor hold us all unclean for Oedipus.
Whatever fate maternal sky bring forth,
Pity Colonus, nor lay us under ban
Because of Oedipus the beggar-man.

OEDIPUS. Has Theseus come? Will he find me living, children? and with all my wits?

ANTIGONE. What would you say to him? What are you afraid of forgetting?

OEDIPUS. He has heaped benefits upon me. The time has come to pay for all.

CHORUS.
Come, King of Athens, father of the land —
Whether at Poseidon's altars and the still
Unfinished sacrifice, or close at hand —
A blind old beggar-man proclaims God's will,
Proclaims a blessing on the land and us;
Come, King of Athens, come, King Theseus.
Enter Theseus

THESEUS. Why this sudden clamour? Why am I called hither, called as it seems by this stranger and by my own people alike? Have you been terrified by the thunder? No wonder indeed if you are terrified by such a storm.

OEDIPUS. Welcome! God has sent you, King; good fortune waits you here.

THESEUS. What has happened, son of Laius?

OEDIPUS. I am about to die, and before I die I would accomplish for you and for this city what has been foretold.

THESEUS. Why do you say you are about to die?

OEDIPUS. The Gods have sent the signs that they promised.

THESEUS. What signs, old man?

OEDIPUS. Prolonged loud thunder and abundant lightning.

THESEUS. YOU have foretold many things, and what you have foretold has come true. Therefore I believe your words and I ask what I must do.

OEDIPUS. Son of Aegeus, I shall expound a mystery and give your city that which time shall never take away. First I shall lead you to my place of death, and though blind I shall need no guiding hand. But that place you must never show to any living man, for it shall be, while it stays hidden, more protection than a multitude of Athenian shields or than the borrowed might of an ally; and there by that place mysteries shall be revealed, revealed to you alone, things that I dare not speak to my own daughters, much as I love them, things it is not lawful to put into words; and these you must guard in your heart and reveal to your successor, and then only upon your deathbed, that they may be revealed to his successor in turn and so through all time. So shall this city and countryside be kept unharmed from the dragon's teeth and from the men of Thebes, but keep it secret: while you keep all secret you shall be safe from your own citizens as from the enemy. Even the best-governed cities are turbulent, and though the Gods punish turbulence they are slow to act. But why should I warn you? the son of

Aegeus knows how to guard himself. Now let us hurry to that place, for the heavens call and I dare not linger. Follow me, children, though but for a portion of the way. It is my turn to guide those that long have been their father's guide; come, come, but lay no hand upon me; all unhelped I shall discover my predestined plot of ground, my sacred tomb. Come this way, this way; Hermes guides and the Goddess of the Dead. O light bathing my body for the last time; O light, my light long ago, I tread the road to Hades; blessed be this land, blessed be its people, you, best of friends, be blessed, and when your fortune mounts, remember me in the tomb.
[He goes out, followed by his daughters, Theseus, and attendants.

CHORUS.
I call upon Persephone, queen of the dead,
And upon Hades, king of night, I call;
Chain all the Furies up that he may tread
The perilous pathway to the Stygian hall
And rest among his mighty peers at last,
For the entanglements of God are past.
Nor may the hundred-headed dog give tongue
Until the daughter of Earth and Tartarus
That even bloodless shades call Death has sung
The travel-broken shade of Oedipus
Through triumph of completed destiny
Into eternal sleep, if such there be.
Enter Messenger

MESSENGER. Fellow-countrymen, three words can sum up all I have to say — Oedipus is dead. But it all took time to happen and it will take time in the telling.

CHORUS. So that unhappy man is dead.

MESSENGER. He is dead indeed.

CHORUS. How? In a God-appointed, painless way?

MESSENGER. There indeed you touch upon the wonder of it. You saw with your own eyes how the man went out from here, none to show him where to set his feet, but he the guide of all. We followed . to the sacrificial hollow in the rock where the foot-paths cross and to the sacred threshold where brazen steps go down into the earth, and there, midway between the four sacred things, the basin of brass, the hollow pear-tree, the marble tomb, the stone from Thoricus, he sat upon the ground and began to loosen his miserable rags. Then he bade his children find spring water for washing and libation, and they climbed the neighbouring hill, found spring water there, and brought it to their father. They washed and dressed him as we wash and dress the dead, and no sooner had all been done according to his commands than there came from under our feet, as if from the place of shades, a sound of thunder. The two children trembled, threw themselves down at their father's knees, beat upon their breasts, wept and cried aloud. And thereupon he cast his arms about them and said, 'From this day you are left without a father, and all that is mine comes to an end. Your attendance upon me has been a heavy burden, children; I know how heavy, and yet it seemed to you light. A word, a solitary word tells all, and that word is love. No living man could have loved as I have loved. But now I go, and never again shall you look upon me through all your days of life.' After he had spoken all three clung to one another, sobbing and crying out; but presently they ceased to sob and to cry out and there was silence, and then a voice spoke and summoned Oedipus, and the hair stood up upon our heads, for it was a God

that spoke. It summoned Oedipus not once but many times. ‘Oedipus, Oedipus,’ it said, ‘what keeps you there? We must set out upon our journey.’ He, knowing what voice had spoken, called King Theseus to his side and said, ‘O best of friends, put your right hand into the hands of my daughters; promise to be their guardian and never forsake them.’ King Theseus, that most magnanimous man, promised and swore an oath, and yet fearing to wring the children’s hearts anew spoke no word of grief. That oath being sworn, Oedipus groped for his daughters with blind hands and said, ‘My children, be brave and go from this place, for there are things it is not lawful for you to see or hear. Go quickly, and let these others go, but let King Theseus stay and hear and see everything, for that is his right.’ When he had spoken the children left and we followed with streaming eyes, but after a little time turned our heads. Oedipus had gone and the King stood there, a hand raised to shade his eyes as from some dreadful sight. Then, after a little, he bent down and kissed the earth, and after raised his arms to heaven praying, as it seemed, to heaven and earth in the same prayer. But by what death Oedipus died no man can say but Theseus. Neither did thunderbolt descend nor storm come up out of the sea, but some messenger carried him away or the foundations of the earth were riven to receive him, riven not by pain but by love. For I affirm, and care not if my words seem folly, that this man has gone without the pang of death and in a manner altogether wonderful.

CHORUS. But where are the others? And where are the two girls?

MESSENGER. That sound of mourning tells where they are.
Enter Antigone, Ismene, and attendants

ISMENE. Where shall we wander, where find our daily bread? I dread what is to come.

CHORUS. Why should you, remembering the bitterness of your past, dread the future?

ISMENE. Things that were most bitter can seem most sweet in memory. How should those days seem bitter when we could take him in our arms? Our beloved is gone down under the earth.

CHORUS. He has found a blessed end.

ANTIGONE. Sister, I will go back there.

ISMENE. Why?

ANTIGONE. I have a great longing.

ISMENE. For what?

ANTIGONE. TO find a bed under the earth.

ISMENE. What bed?

ANTIGONE. Our father’s bed.

ISMENE. I thought you understood.

ANTIGONE. Understood what?

ISMENE. That he had no tomb, that nobody can tell where he lies, that he went alone to his death.

ANTIGONE. Bring me to where we saw him last and kill me there.

ISMENE. But if you died I should be friendless.

CHORUS. DO not be afraid, my children.

ANTIGONE. What refuge have we but our father's tomb?

CHORUS. A refuge has been found.
Enter Theseus

THESEUS. Your father is with the Powers under the earth; you have his promise and their protection. Do not vex them with lamentation. I bring you the protection of Athens.

ANTIGONE. Promise me, son of Aegeus.

THESEUS. What must I promise?

ANTIGONE. TO bring me to my father's tomb.

THESEUS. The law forbids.

ANTIGONE. But you are King of Athens.

THESEUS. He laid a charge upon me that never human foot approach that place.

ANTIGONE. If that be my father's will I must obey.

THESEUS. In all else it shall be as you will. I will omit nothing that can profit you or gratify the dead.

CHORUS. Raise no funeral song. God’s will has been accomplished.

Curtain

The Cat and the Moon

To John Masefield

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A Blind Beggar —
A Lame Beggar
Three Musicians

THE CAT AND THE MOON

SCENE. — The scene is any bare place before a wall against which stands a patterned screen, or hangs a patterned curtain suggesting Saint Colman's Well. Three Musicians are sitting close to the wall, with zither, drum, and flute. Their faces are made up to resemble masks.

FIRST MUSICIAN *[singing].*
The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon,
The creeping cat, looked up.
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
For, wander and wail as he would,
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.

[Two beggars enter — a blind man with a lame man on his back. They wear grotesque masks. The Blind Beggar is counting the paces.

BLIND BEGGAR. One thousand and six, one thousand and seven, one thousand and nine. Look well now, for we should be in sight of the holy well of Saint Colman. The beggar at the cross-roads said it was one thousand paces from where he stood and a few paces over. Look well now, can you see the big ash-tree that's above it?

LAME BEGGAR *[getting down].* No, not yet.

BLIND BEGGAR. Then we must have taken a wrong turn; flighty you always were, and maybe before the day is over you will have me drowned

in Kiltartan River or maybe in the sea itself.

LAME BEGGAR. I have brought you the right way, but you are a lazy man, Blind Man, and you make very short strides.

BLIND BEGGAR. It's great daring you have, and how could I make a long stride and you on my back from the peep o' day?

LAME BEGGAR. And maybe the beggar of the cross-roads was only making it up when he said a thousand paces and a few paces more.

You and I, being beggars, know the way of beggars, and maybe he never paced it at all, being a lazy man.

BLIND BEGGAR. Get up. It's too much talk you have.

LAME BEGGAR *[getting up].* But as I was saying, he being a lazy man — O, O, O, stop pinching the calf of my leg and I'll not say another word till I'm spoken to.

[They go round the stage once, moving to drum-taps, and as they move the following song is sung.

FIRST MUSICIAN *[singing].*

Minnaloushe runs in the grass
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?
When two close kindred meet
What better than call a dance?
Maybe the moon may learn,

Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.

BLIND BEGGAR. DO you see the big ash-tree?

LAME BEGGAR. I do then, and the wall under it, and the flat stone, and the things upon the stone; and here is a good dry place to kneel in.

BLIND BEGGAR. YOU may get down so. *[Lame Beggar gets down.]* I begin to have it in my mind that I am a great fool, and it was you who egged me on with your flighty talk.

LAME BEGGAR. HOW should you be a great fool to ask the saint to give you back your two eyes?

BLIND BEGGAR. There is many gives money to a blind man and would give nothing but a curse to a whole man, and if it was not for one thing — but no matter anyway.

LAME BEGGAR. If I speak out all that's in my mind you won't take a blow at me at all?

BLIND BEGGAR. I will not this time.

LAME BEGGAR. Then I'll tell you why you are not a great fool. When you go out to pick up a chicken, or maybe a stray goose on the road, or a cabbage from a neighbour's garden, I have to go riding on your back; and if I want a goose, or a chicken, or a cabbage, I must have your two legs under me.

BLIND BEGGAR. That's true now, and if we were whole men and went different ways, there'd be as much again between us.

LAME BEGGAR. And your own goods keep going from you because you are blind.

BLIND BEGGAR. Rogues and thieves ye all are, but there are some I may have my eyes on yet.

LAME BEGGAR. Because there's no one to see a man slipping in at the door, or throwing a leg over the wall of a yard, you are a bitter temptation to many a poor man, and I say it's not right, it's not right at all. There are poor men that because you are blind will be delayed in Purgatory.

BLIND BEGGAR. Though you are a rogue, Lame Man, maybe you are in the right.

LAME BEGGAR. And maybe we'll see the blessed saint this day, for there's an odd one sees him, and maybe that will be a grander thing than having my two legs, though legs are a grand thing.

BLIND BEGGAR. You're getting flighty again, Lame Man; what could be better for you than to have your two legs?

LAME BEGGAR. DO you think now will the saint put an ear on him at all, and we without an Ave or a Paternoster to put before the prayer or after the prayer?

BLIND BEGGAR. Wise though you are and flighty though you are, and you throwing eyes to the right of you and eyes to the left of you, there's many a thing you don't know about the heart of man.

LAME BEGGAR. But it stands to reason that he'd be put out and he maybe with a great liking for the Latin.

BLIND BEGGAR. I have it in mind that the saint will be better pleased at us not knowing a prayer at all, and that we had best say what we want in plain language. What pleasure can he have in all that holy company kneeling at his well on holidays and Sundays, and they as innocent maybe as himself?

LAME BEGGAR. That's a strange thing to say, and do you say it as I or another might say it, or as a blind man?

BLIND BEGGAR. I say it as a blind man, I say it because since I went blind in the tenth year of my age, I have been hearing and remembering the knowledges of the world.

LAME BEGGAR. And you who are a blind man say that a saint, and he living in a pure well of water, would soonest be talking with a sinful man.

BLIND BEGGAR. DO you mind what the beggar told you about the holy man in the big house at Laban?

LAME BEGGAR. Nothing stays in my head, Blind Man.

BLIND BEGGAR. What does he do but go knocking about the roads with an old lecher from the county of Mayo, and he a womanhater from the day of his birth! And what do they talk of by candie-light and by daylight? The old lecher does be telling over all the sins he committed, or maybe never committed at all, and the man of Laban does be trying to head him off and quiet him down that he may quit telling them.

LAME BEGGAR. Maybe it is converting him he is.

BLIND BEGGAR. If you were a blind man you wouldn't say a foolish thing the like of that. He wouldn't have him different, no, not if he was to get all Ireland. If he was different, what would they find to talk about, will you answer me that now?

LAME BEGGAR. We have great wisdom between us, that's certain.

BLIND BEGGAR. NOW the Church says that it is a good thought, and a sweet thought, and a comfortable thought, that every man may have a saint to look after him, and I, being blind, give it out to all the world that the bigger the sinner the better pleased is the saint.
I am sure and certain that Saint Colman would not have us two different from what we are.

LAME BEGGAR. I'll not give in to that, for, as I was saying, he has a great liking maybe for the Latin.

BLIND BEGGAR. IS it contradicting me you are? Are you in reach of my arm?
[swinging stick].

LAME BEGGAR. I'm not, Blind Man, you couldn't touch me at all; but as I was saying —

FIRST MUSICIAN *[speaking].* Will you be cured or will you be blessed?

LAME BEGGAR. Lord save us, that is the saint's voice and we not on our knees.
[They kneel.

BLIND BEGGAR. Is he standing before us, Lame Man?

LAME BEGGAR. I cannot see him at all. It is in the ash-tree he is, or up in the air.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Will you be cured or will you be blessed?

LAME BEGGAR. There he is again.

BLIND BEGGAR. I'll be cured of my blindness.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I am a saint and lonely. Will you become blessed and stay blind and we will be together always?

BLIND BEGGAR. NO, no, your Reverence, if I have to choose, I'll have the sight of my two eyes, for those that have their sight are always stealing my things and telling me lies, and some maybe that are near me. So don't take it bad of me, Holy Man, that I ask the sight of my two eyes.

LAME BEGGAR. NO one robs him and no one tells him lies; it's all in his head, it is. He's had his tongue on me all day because he thinks I stole a sheep of his.

BLIND BEGGAR. It was the feel of his sheepskin coat put it into my head, but my sheep was black, they say, and he tells me, Holy
Man, that his sheepskin is of the most lovely white wool so that it is a joy to be looking at it.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Lame Man, will you be cured or will you be blessed?

LAME BEGGAR. What would it be like to be blessed?

FIRST MUSICIAN. YOU would be of the kin of the blessed saints and of the martyrs.

LAME BEGGAR. IS it true now that they have a book and that they write the names of the blessed in that book?

FIRST MUSICIAN. Many a time I have seen the book, and your name would be in it.

LAME BEGGAR. It would be a grand thing to have two legs under me, but I have it in my mind that it would be a grander thing to have my name in that book.

FIRST MUSICIAN. It would be a grander thing.

LAME BEGGAR. I will stay lame, Holy Man, and I will be blessed.

FIRST MUSICIAN. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit I give this Blind Man sight and I make this Lame Man blessed.

BLIND BEGGAR. I see it all now, the blue sky and the big ash-tree and the well and the flat stone, — all as I have heard the people say — and the things the praying people put on the stone, the beads and the candles and the leaves torn out of prayer-books, and the hairpins and the buttons. It is a great sight and a blessed sight, but I don't see yourself, Holy Man — is it up in the big tree you are?

LAME BEGGAR. Why, there he is in front of you and he laughing out of his wrinkled face.

BLIND BEGGAR. Where, where?

LAME BEGGAR. Why, there, between you and the ash-tree.

BLIND BEGGAR. There's nobody there — you're at your lies again.

LAME BEGGAR. I am blessed, and that is why I can see the holy saint.

BLIND BEGGAR. But if I don't see the saint, there's something else I can see.

LAME BEGGAR. The blue sky and green leaves are a great sight, and a strange sight to one that has been long blind.

BLIND BEGGAR. There is a stranger sight than that, and that is the skin of my own black sheep on your back.

LAME BEGGAR. Haven't I been telling you from the peep o' day that my sheepskin is that white it would dazzle you?

BLIND BEGGAR. Are you so swept with the words that you've never thought that when I had my own two eyes, I'd see what colour was on it?

LAME BEGGAR [*very dejected].* I never thought of that.

BLIND BEGGAR. Are you that flighty?

LAME BEGGAR. I am that flighty. *[Cheering up.]* But am I not blessed, and it's a sin to speak against the blessed?

BLIND BEGGAR. Well, I'll speak against the blessed, and I'll tell you something more that I'll do. All the while you were telling me how, if I had my two eyes, I could pick up a chicken here and a goose there, while my neighbours were in bed, do you know what I was thinking?

LAME BEGGAR. Some wicked blind man's thought.

BLIND BEGGAR. It was, and it's not gone from me yet. I was saying to myself, I have a long arm and a strong arm and a very weighty arm, and when I get my own two eyes I shall know where to hit.

LAME BEGGAR. Don't lay a hand on me. Forty years we've been knocking about the roads together, and I wouldn't have you bring your soul into mortal peril.

BLIND BEGGAR. I have been saying to myself, I shall know where to hit and how to hit and who to hit.

LAME BEGGAR. DO you not know that I am blessed? Would you be as bad as Caesar and as Herod and Nero and the other wicked emperors of antiquity?

BLIND BEGGAR. Where'll I hit him, for the love of God, where'll I hit him?
[Blind Beggar beats Lame Beggar. The beating takes the form of a dance and is accompanied on drum and flute. The Blind Beggar goes out.

LAME BEGGAR. That is a soul lost, Holy Man.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Maybe so.

LAME BEGGAR. I'd better be going, Holy Man, for he'll rouse the whole country against me.

FIRST MUSICIAN. He'll do that.

LAME BEGGAR. And I have it in my mind not to even myself again with the martyrs, and the holy confessors, till I am more used to being blessed.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Bend down your back.

LAME BEGGAR. What for, Holy Man?

FIRST MUSICIAN. That I may get up on it.

LAME BEGGAR. But my lame legs would never bear the weight of you.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I'm up now.

LAME BEGGAR. I don't feel you at all.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I don't weigh more than a grasshopper.

LAME BEGGAR. You do not.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Are you happy?

LAME BEGGAR. I would be if I was right sure I was blessed.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Haven't you got me for a friend?

LAME BEGGAR. I have so.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Then you're blessed.

LAME BEGGAR. Will you see that they put my name in the book?

FIRST MUSICIAN. I will then.

LAME BEGGAR. Let us be going, Holy Man.

FIRST MUSICIAN. But you must bless the road.

LAME BEGGAR. I haven't the right words.

FIRST MUSICIAN. What do you want words for? Bow to what is before you, bow to what is behind you, bow to what is to the left of you, bow to what is to the right of you.
[The Lame Beggar begins to bow.

FIRST MUSICIAN. That's no good.

LAME BEGGAR. NO good, Holy Man?

FIRST MUSICIAN. No good at all. You must dance.

LAME BEGGAR. But how can I dance? Ain't I a lame man?

FIRST MUSICIAN. Aren't you blessed?

LAME BEGGAR. Maybe so.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Aren't you a miracle?

LAME BEGGAR. I am, Holy Man.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Then dance, and that'll be a miracle.
[The Lame Beggar begins to dance, at first clumsily, moving about with his stick, then he throws away the stick and dances more and more quickly. Whenever he strikes the ground strongly with his lame foot the cymbals clash. He goes out dancing, after which follows the First Musician's song.

FIRST MUSICIAN *[singing],*
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place.
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils —
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range?
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise, —
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

Curtain

Fighting the Waves

To Hildo Van Krop

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Three Musicians —
Emer
Cuchulain —
Eithne Inguba
The Ghost of Cuchulain —
The Figure of Cuchulain
The Woman of the Sidhe

FIGHTING THE WAVES

PROLOGUE

Musicians and speaker off stage. There is a curtain with a wave pattern. A man wearing the Cuchulain mask enters from one side with sword and shield. He dances a dance which represents a man fighting the waves. The waves may be represented by other dancers: in his frenzy he supposes the waves to be his enemies: gradually he sinks down as if overcome, then fixes his eyes with a cataleptic stare upon some imaginary distant object. The stage becomes dark, and when the light returns it is empty. The Musicians enter. Two stand one on either side of the curtain, singing.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

A woman's beauty is like a white
Frail bird, like a white sea-bird alone
At daybreak after stormy night
Between two furrows upon the ploughed land:
A sudden storm and it was thrown
Between dark furrows upon the ploughed land.
How many centuries spent
The sedentary soul In toil of measurement
Beyond eagle or mole,
Beyond hearing or seeing,
Or Archimedes' guess,
To raise into being
That loveliness?

A strange, unserviceable thing,
A fragile, exquisite, pale shell,
That the vast troubled waters bring

To the loud sands before day has broken.
The storm arose and suddenly fell
Amid the dark before day had broken.
What death? What discipline?
What bonds no man could unbind,
Being imagined within
The labyrinth of the mind,
What pursuing or fleeing,
What wounds, what bloody press
Dragged into being
This loveliness?

[When the curtain is drawn the Musicians take their place against the wall. One sees a bed with curtains: the man lying on the bed is Cuchulain; the part is taken, however, by a different actor, who has a mask similar to that of the dancer — the Cuchulain mask. Emer stands beside the bed. The Ghost of Cuchulain crouches near the foot of the bed.

FIRST MUSICIAN *[speaking],* I call before your eyes some poor fisherman's house dark with smoke, nets hanging from the rafters, here and there an oar perhaps, and in the midst upon a bed a man dead or swooning. It is that famous man Cuchulain, the best man with every sort of weapon, the best man to gain the love of a woman; his wife Queen Emer is at his side; there is no one with her, for she has sent everyone away, but yonder at the door someone stands and hesitates, wishes to come into the room and is afraid to do so; it is young Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain's mistress. Beyond her, through the open door, the stormy sea. Beyond the foot of the bed, dressed in grave-clothes, the ghost of Cuchulain is kneeling.

FIRST MUSICIAN *[singing]*
White shell, white wing!
I will not choose for my friend
A frail, unserviceable thing
That drifts and dreams, and but knows
That waters are without end
And that wind blows.

EMER. Come hither, come sit beside the bed; do not be afraid, it was I that sent for you.

EITHNE INGUBA. No, madam, I have wronged you too deeply to sit there.

EMER. We two alone of all the people in the world have the right to watch together here, because we have loved him best.

EITHNE INGUBA *[coming nearer].* Is he dead?

EMER. The fishermen think him dead, it was they that put the graveclothes upon him.

EITHNE INGUBA *[feeling the body].* He is cold. There is no breath upon his lips.

EMER. Those who win the terrible friendship of the gods sometimes lie a long time as if dead.

EITHNE INGUBA. I have heard of such things; the very heart stops and yet they live after. What happened?

EMER. He fought and killed an unknown man, and found after that it was his own son that he had killed.

EITHNE INGUBA. A son of yours and his?

EMER. So that is your first thought! His son and mine. *[She laughs-]* Did you think that he belonged to you and me alone? He loved women before he heard our names, and he will love women after he has forgotten us both. The man he killed was the son of some woman he loved long ago, and I think he loved her better than he has loved you or me.

EITHNE INGUBA. That is natural, he must have been young in those days and loved as you and I love.

EMER. I think he loved her as no man ever loved, for when he heard the name of the man he had killed, and the name of that man's mother, he went out of his senses utterly. He ran into the sea, and with shield before him and sword in hand he fought the deathless sea. Of all the many men who had stood there to look at the fight not one dared stop him or even call his name; they stood in a kind of stupor, collected together in a bunch like cattle in a storm, until, fixing his eyes as it seemed upon some new enemy, he waded out further still and the waves swept over him.

EITHNE INGUBA. He is dead indeed, and he has been drowned in the sea.

EMER. He is not dead.

EITHNE INGUBA. He is dead, and you have not kissed his lips nor laid your head upon his breast.

EMER. That is some changeling they have put there, some image of somebody or something bewitched in his likeness, a sea-washed log, it may be, or some old spirit. I would throw it into the fire, but I dare not. They have Cuchulain for a hostage.

EITHNE INGUBA. I have heard of such changelings.

EMER. Before you came I called his name again and again. I told him that Queen Maeve and all her Connacht men are marching north and east, and that there is none but he to make a stand against them, but he would not hear me. I am but his wife, and a man grows tired of a wife. But if you call upon him with that sweet voice, that voice that is so dear to him, he cannot help but listen.

EITHNE INGUBA. I am but his newest love, and in the end he will turn to the woman who has loved him longest, who has kept the house for him no matter where he strayed or to whom.

EMER. I have indeed that hope, the hope that some day he and I will sit together at the fire as when we were first married.

EITHNE INGUBA. Women like me awake a violent love for a while, and when the time is over are flung into some corner like an old eggshell. Cuchulain, listen!

EMER. No, not yet; for first I must cover up his face, I must hide him from the sea. I must throw new logs upon the fire and stir the halfburnt logs into a flame. The sea is full of enchantment, whatever lies on that bed is from the sea, but all enchantments dread the hearth-fire. *[She pulls the curtains of the bed so as to hide the sick man's face, that the actor may change his*

mask unseen. She goes to one side of the stage and moves her hand as though putting logs on a fire and stirring it into a blaze. While she makes these movements the Musicians play, marking the movements with drum and flute perhaps. Having finished she stands beside the imaginary fire at a distance from Cuchulain and Eithne Inguba.
Call on Cuchulain now.

EITHNE INGUBA. Can you hear my voice, Cuchulain?

EMER. Bend over whatever thing lies there, call out dear secrets and speak to it as though it were his very self.

EITHNE INGUBA. Cuchulain, listen!

EMER. Those are timid words. To be afraid because his wife is standing by when there is so great need but proves that he chose badly.
Remember who you are and who he is, that we are two women struggling with the sea.

EITHNE INGUBA. O my beloved! Pardon me, pardon me that I could be ashamed when you were in such need. Never did I send a message, never did I call your name, scarce had I a longing for your company but that you have known and come. Remember that never up to this hour have you been silent when I would have you speak, remember that I have always made you talkative. If you are not lying there, if that is some stranger or someone or something bewitched into your likeness, drive it away, remember that for someone to take your likeness from you is a great insult. If you are lying there, stretch out your arms and speak, open your mouth and speak. *[She turns to Emer.]* He does not hear me, no sound reaches him, or it reaches him and he cannot speak.

EMER. Then kiss that image; these things are a great mystery, and maybe his mouth will feel the pressure of your mouth upon that image. Is it not so that we approach the gods?

EITHNE INGUBA *[starting back]*. I felt it was some evil, devilish thing!

EMER. No, his body stirs, the pressure of your mouth has called him.
He has thrown the changeling out.

EITHNE INGUBA *[going further off]*. Look at that hand! That hand is withered to the bone.

EMER *[going up to the bed]*. What are you, what do you come for, and from where?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I am one of the spirits from the sea.

EMER. What spirit from the sea dares lie upon Cuchulain's bed and take his image?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I am called Bricriu, I am the maker of discord.

EMER. Come for what purpose?
[Exit Eithne Inguba.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. I show my face and everything he loves must fly.

EMER. I have not fled your face.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. YOU are not loved.

EMER. And therefore have no dread to meet your eyes and to demand my husband.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. He is here, your lamentations and that woman's lamentations have brought him in a sort of dream, but you can never win him without my help. Come to my left hand and I will touch your eyes and give you sight.

EMER *[seeing the Ghost of Cuchulain].* Husband! Husband!

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. He seems near, and yet is as much out of reach as though there were a world between. I have made him visible to you. I cannot make you visible to him.

EMER. Cuchulain! Cuchulain!

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. Be silent, woman! He can neither see nor hear. But I can give him to you at a price. *[Clashing of cymbals, etc.]* Listen to that. Listen to the horses of the sea trampling! Fand, daughter of Manannan, has come. She is reining in her chariot, that is why the horses trample so. She is come to take Cuchulain from you, to take him away for ever, but I am her enemy, and I can show you how to thwart her.

EMER. Fand, daughter of Manannan!

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. While he is still here you can keep him if you pay the price. Once back in Manannan's house he is lost to you for ever. Those who love the daughters of the sea do not grow weary, nor do the daughters of the sea release their lovers.

EMER. There is no price I will not pay.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. You spoke but now of a hope that some day his love may return to you, that some day you may sit by the fire as when first married.

EMER. That is the one hope I have, the one thing that keeps me alive.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. Renounce it, and he shall live again.

EMER. Never, never!

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. What else have you to offer?

EMER. Why should the gods demand such a sacrifice?

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. The gods must serve those who living become like the dead.

EMER. I will get him in-despite of all the gods, but I will not renounce his love.
[Fand, the Woman of the Sidhe, enters. Emer draws a dagger and moves as if to strike her.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN *[laughing]*. You think to wound her with a knife! She has an airy body, an invulnerable body. Remember that though your lamentations have dragged him hither, once he has left this shore, once he has passed the bitter sea, once he lands in Manannan's house, he will be as the gods who remember nothing.

[The Woman of the Sidhe, Fand, moves round the crouching Ghost of Cuchulain at front of stage in a dance that grows gradually quicker as he awakes. At moments she may drop her hair upon his head, but she does not

kiss him. She is accompanied by string and flute and drum. Her mask and clothes must suggest gold or bronze or brass and silver, so that she seems more an idol than a human being. This suggestion may be repeated in her movements. Her hair, too, must keep the metallic suggestion. The object of the dance is that having awakened Cuchulain he will follow Fand out; probably he will seek a kiss and the kiss will be withheld.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. Cry out that you renounce his love, cry that you renounce his love for ever.
[Fand and Cuchulain go out.

EMER. NO, no, never will I give that cry.

FIGURE OF CUCHULAIN. Fool, fool! I am Fand's enemy. I come to tell you how to thwart her and you do nothing. There is yet time. Listen to the horses of the chariot, they are trampling the shore. They are wild and trampling. She has mounted into her chariot. Cuchulain is not yet beside her. Will you leave him to such as she? Renounce his love, and all her power over him comes to an end.

EMER. I renounce Cuchulain's love. I renounce it for ever.
[Figure of Cuchulain falls back upon the bed, drawing or partly drawing its curtain that he may change his mask.
Eithne Inguba enters.

EITHNE INGUBA. Cuchulain, Cuchulain! Remember our last meeting. We lay all night among the sand-hills; dawn came; we heard the crying of the birds upon the shore. Come to me, beloved. *[The curtain of the bed moves.]* Look, look! He has come back, he is there in the bed, he has his own rightful form again. It is I who have won him. It is my love that has brought

him back to life!
[The figure in the bed pulls back the curtain. He wears the mask of Cuchulain.

EMER. Cuchulain wakes!

CUCHULAIN. Your arms, your arms! O Eithne Inguba, I have been in some strange place and am afraid.

EPILOGUE
[The Musicians, singing as follows, draw the wave-curtain until it masks the bed, Cuchulain, Eithne Inguba, and Emer.

FIRST MUSICIAN
Why does your heart beat thus?
Plain to be understood, I have met in a man's house
A statue of solitude,
Moving there and walking,
Its strange heart beating fast
For all our talking;
O still that heart at last.

O bitter reward
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word,
A passing word.
Although the door be shut
And all seem well enough,
Although wide world hold not

A man but will give you his love
The moment he has looked at you,
He that has loved the best
May turn from a statue
His too human breast.

O bitter reward
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word,
A passing word.

What makes your heart so beat?
Is there no man at your side?
When beauty is complete
Your own thought will have died
And danger not be diminished;
Dimmed at three-quarter light,
When moon's round is finished
The stars are out of sight.

O bitter reward
Of many a tragic tomb!
And we though astonished are dumb
Or give but a sigh and a word,
A passing word.

[The Musicians return to their places. Fand, the Woman of the Sidhe, enters and dances a dance which expresses her despair for the loss of Cuchulain. As before there may be other dancers who represent the

waves. It is called, in order to balance the first dance, 'Fand mourns among the waves.' It is essentially a dance which symbolises, like water in the fortunetelling books, bitterness. As she takes her final pose of despair the Curtain falls.

Curtain

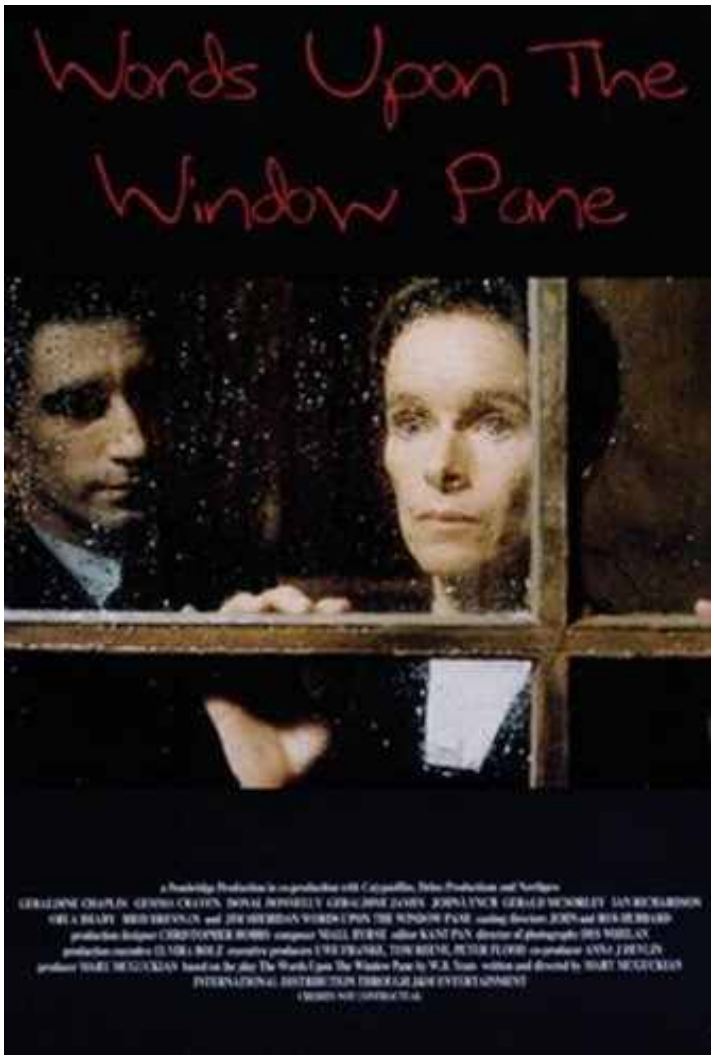
The Words upon the Window-Pane

First published in 1934, this popular one-act play is set in Dublin during the time of the turbulent 1920's. The action takes place in the parlour of a now-seedy boarding-house, which in the past had an illustrious history. Built in the eighteenth century and originally owned by friends of Jonathan Swift, the house has had as its occupant's two celebrated Irish patriots, as well as Esther Johnson (1681-1728), Swift's "Stella." As the play opens, guests are arriving for a séance, to be conducted by Mrs. Henderson, a medium who has journeyed from London at the invitation of the Dublin Spiritualists' Association, tying in with one of Yeats life-long obsessions – spiritualism.

This play was in fact Yeats' most successful drama, which the playwright himself was particularly surprised to learn. *The Words upon the Window-Pane* was dedicated to Yeats' dearest friend and supporter, Lady Augusta Gregory, who died earlier that year. Lady Gregory had been Yeats' staunchest ally for many years, co-founding the Abbey Theatre and serving as a major literary influence in early twentieth-century literature in Ireland. Yeats wrote this play while staying at Coole Park, Lady Gregory's magnificent home in County Galway, which he visited every summer for over thirty years.

Lady Gregory (1852-1932)

Coole Park, County Galway, which Yeats visited many times



The 1994 film adaptation of the play

In Memory of

LADY GREGORY

IN WHOSE HOUSE IT WAS WRITTEN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Dr. Trench
Miss Mackenna
John Corbet
Cornelius Patterson
Abraham Johnson
Mrs. Mallet
Mrs. Henderson

THE WORDS UPON THE WINDOW-PANE

A lodging-house room, an armchair, a little table in front of it, chairs on either side. A fireplace and window. A kettle on the hob and some tea-things on a dresser. A door to back and towards the right. Through the door one can see an entrance hall. The sound of a knocker. Miss Mackenna passes through and then she re-enters the hall together with John Corbet, a man of twenty-two or twenty-three, and Dr. Trench, a man of between sixty and seventy.

DR. TRENCH *[in hall].* May I introduce John Corbet, one of the Corbets of Ballymoney, but at present a Cambridge student? This is Miss Mackenna, our energetic secretary.
[They come into room, take off their coats]

MISS MACKENNA. I thought it better to let you in myself. This country is still sufficiently medieval to make spiritualism an undesirable theme for gossip. Give me your coats and hats, I will put them in my own room. It is just across the hall. Better sit down, your watches must be fast. Mrs. Henderson is lying down, as she always does before a séance. We won't begin for ten minutes yet.
[She goes out with hats and coats]

DR. TRENCH. Miss Mackenna does all the real work of the Dublin Spiritualists' Association. She did all the correspondence with Mrs. Henderson, and persuaded the landlady to let her this big room and a small room upstairs. We are a poor society and could not guarantee anything in advance. Mrs. Henderson has come from London at her own risk. She was born in Dublin and wants to spread the movement here. She lives very

economically and does not expect a great deal. We all give what we can. A poor woman with the soul of an apostle.

JOHN CORBET. Have there been many séances?

DR. TRENCH. Only three so far.

JOHN CORBET. I hope she will not mind my scepticism. I have looked into Myers' *Human Personality* and a wild book by Conan Doyle, but am unconvinced.

DR. TRENCH. We all have to find the truth for ourselves. Lord Dunraven, then Lord Adare, introduced my father to the famous David Home. My father often told me that he saw David Home floating in the air in broad daylight, but I did not believe a word of it. I had to investigate for myself, and I was very hard to convince. Mrs. Piper, an American trance medium, not unlike Mrs. Henderson, convinced me.

JOHN CORBET. A state of somnambulism and voices coming through her lips that purport to be those of dead persons?

DR. TRENCH. Exactly: quite the best kind of mediumship if you want to establish the identity of a spirit. But do not expect too much. There has been a hostile influence.

JOHN CORBET. YOU mean an evil spirit?

DR. TRENCH. The poet Blake said that he never knew a bad man that had not something very good about him. I say a hostile influence, an influence that disturbed the last séance very seriously. I cannot tell you what happened, for I have not been at any of Mrs. Henderson's séances. Trance

mediumship has nothing new to show me — I told the young people when they made me their President that I would probably stay at home, that I could get more out of Emanuel Swedenborg than out of any seance. *[A knock.]* That is probably old Cornelius Patterson; he thinks they race horses and whippets in the other world, and is, so they tell me, so anxious to find out if he is right that he is always punctual. Miss Mackenna will keep him to herself for some minutes. He gives her tips for Harold's Cross.
[MISS MACKENNA *crosses to hall door and admits Cornelius Patterson. She brings him to her room across the hall.*

JOHN CORBET *[who has been wandering about].* This is a wonderful room for a lodging-house.

DR. TRENCH. It was a private house until about fifty years ago. It was not so near the town in those days, and there are large stables at the back. Quite a number of notable people lived here. Grattan was born upstairs; no, not Grattan, Curran perhaps — I forget — but I do know that this house in the early part of the eighteenth century belonged to friends of Jonathan Swift, or rather of Stella.
Swift chaffed her in the *Journal to Stella* because of certain small sums of money she lost at cards probably in this very room. That was before Vanessa appeared upon the scene. It was a countryhouse in those days, surrounded by trees and gardens. Somebody cut some lines from a poem of hers upon the window-pane — tradition says Stella herself. *[A knock.]* Here they are, but you will hardly make them out in this light.
[They stand in the window. Corbet stoops down to see better.
Miss Mackenna and Abraham Johnson enter and stand near door.]

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. Where is Mrs. Henderson?

MISS MACKENNA. She is upstairs; she always rests before a séance.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. I must see her before the séance. I know exactly what to do to get rid of this evil influence.

MISS MACKENNA. If you go up to see her there will be no séance at all. She says it is dangerous even to think, much less to speak of, an evil influence.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. Then I shall speak to the President.

MISS MACKENNA. Better talk the whole thing over first in my room. Mrs. Henderson says that there must be perfect harmony.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. Something must be done. The last séance was completely spoiled.
[A *knock.]*

MISS MACKENNA. That may be Mrs. Mallet; she is a very experienced spiritualist. Come to my room, old Patterson and some others are there already.
[She brings him to the other room and later crosses to hall door to admit Mrs. Mallet-]

JOHN CORBET. I know those lines well — they are part of a poem Stella wrote for Swift's fifty-fourth birthday. Only three poems of hers — and some lines she added to a poem of Swift's — have come down to us, but they are enough to prove her a better poet than
Swift. Even those few words on the window make me think of a seventeenth-century poet, Donne or Crashaw.
[He quotes]

‘You taught how I might youth prolong
By knowing what is right and wrong,
How from my heart to bring supplies
Of lustre to my fading eyes.’

How strange that a celibate scholar, well on in life, should keep the love of two such women! He met Vanessa in London at the height of his political power. She followed him to Dublin. She loved him for nine years, perhaps died of love, but Stella loved him all her life.

DR. TRENCH. I have shown that writing to several persons, and you are the first who has recognised the lines.

JOHN CORBET. I am writing an essay on Swift and Stella for my doctorate at Cambridge. I hope to prove that in Swift’s day men of intellect reached the height of their power — the greatest position they ever attained in society and the State, that everything great in Ireland and in our character, in what remains of our architecture, comes from that day; that we have kept its seal longer than England.

DR. TRENCH. A tragic life: Bolingbroke, Harley, Ormonde, all those great Ministers that were his friends, banished and broken.

JOHN CORBET. I do not think you can explain him in that way — his tragedy had deeper foundations. His ideal order was the Roman Senate, his ideal men Brutus and Cato. Such an order and such men had seemed possible once more, but the movement passed and he foresaw the ruin to come, Democracy, Rousseau, the French Revolution; that is why he hated the common run of men, — ’I hate lawyers, I hate doctors,’ he said, ‘though I love Dr. So-and-so and Judge So-and-so’ — that is why he wrote *Gulliver,*

that is why he wore out his brain, that is why he felt *saeva indignatio,* that is why he sleeps under the greatest epitaph in history. You remember how it goes? It is almost finer in English than in Latin: ‘He has gone where fierce indignation can lacerate his heart no more.’ *[Abraham Johnson comes in, followed by Mrs. Mallet and*
Cornelius Patterson.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. Something must be done, Dr. Trench, to drive away the influence that has destroyed our séances. I have come here week after week at considerable expense. I am from Belfast. I am by profession a minister of the Gospel, I do a great deal of work among the poor and ignorant. I produce considerable effect by singing and preaching, but I know that my effect should be much greater than it is. My hope is that I shall be able to communicate with the great Evangelist Moody. I want to ask him to stand invisible beside me when I speak or sing, and lay his hands upon my head and give me such a portion of his power that my work may be blessed as the work of Moody and Sankey was blessed.

MRS. MALLET. What Mr. Johnson says about the hostile influence is quite true. The last two séances were completely spoilt. I am thinking of starting a teashop in Folkestone. I followed Mrs. Henderson to Dublin to get my husband’s advice, but two spirits kept talking and would not let any other spirit say a word.

DR. TRENCH. Did the spirits say the same thing and go through the same drama at both séances?

MRS. MALLET. Yes — just as if they were characters in some kind of horrible play.

DR. TRENCH. That is what I was afraid of.

MRS. MALLET. My husband was drowned at sea ten years ago, but constantly speaks to me through Mrs. Henderson as if he were still alive. He advises me about everything I do, and I am utterly lost if I cannot question him.

CORNELIUS PATTERSON. I never did like the Heaven they talk about in churches; but when somebody told me that Mrs. Mallet's husband ate and drank and went about with his favourite dog, I said to myself, 'That is the place for Corney Patterson'. I came here to find out if it was true, and I declare to God I have not heard one word about it.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. I ask you, Dr. Trench, as President of the Dublin Spiritualists' Association, to permit me to read the ritual of exorcism appointed for such occasions. After the last séance I copied it out of an old book in the library of Belfast University. I have it here.
[He takes paper out of bis pocket.

DR. TRENCH. The spirits are people like ourselves, we treat them as our guests and protect them from discourtesy and violence, and every exorcism is a curse or a threatened curse. We do not admit that there are evil spirits. Some spirits are earth-bound — they think they are still living and go over and over some action of their past lives, just as we go over and over some painful thought, except that where they are thought is reality. For instance, when a spirit which has died a violent death comes to a medium for the first time, it re-lives all the pains of death.

MRS. MALLET. When my husband came for the first time the medium gasped and struggled as if she was drowning. It was terrible to watch.

DR. TRENCH. Sometimes a spirit re-lives not the pain of death but some passionate or tragic moment of life. Swedenborg describes this and gives the reason for it. There is an incident of the kind in the *Odyssey,* and many in Eastern literature; the murderer repeats his murder, the robber his robbery, the lover his serenade, the soldier hears the trumpet once again. If I were a Catholic I would say that such spirits were in Purgatory. In vain do we write *requiescat in pace* upon the tomb, for they must suffer, and we in our turn must suffer until God gives peace. Such spirits do not often come to séances unless those séances are held in houses where those spirits lived, or where the event took place. This spirit which speaks those incomprehensible words and does not answer when spoken to is of such a nature. The more patient we are, the more quickly will it pass out of its passion and its remorse.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. I am still convinced that the spirit which disturbed the last séance is evil. If I may not exorcise it I will certainly pray for protection.

DR. TRENCH. Mrs. Henderson's control, Lulu, is able and experienced and can protect both medium and sitters, but it may help
Lulu if you pray that the spirit find rest.
[Abraham Johnson sits down and prays silently, moving his lips. Mrs. Henderson comes in with Miss Mackenna and others. Miss Mackenna shuts the door.

DR. TRENCH. Mrs. Henderson, may I introduce to you Mr. Corbet, a young man from Cambridge and a sceptic, who hopes that you will be able to convince him?

MRS. HENDERSON. We were all sceptics once. He must not expect too much from a first séance. He must persevere.
[She sits in the armchair, and the others begin to seat themselves. Miss Mackenna goes to John Corbet and they remain standing.]

MISS MACKENNA. I am glad that you are a sceptic.

JOHN CORBET. I thought you were a spiritualist.

MISS MACKENNA. I have seen a good many séances, and sometimes think it is all coincidence and thought-transference. *[She says this in a low voice.]* Then at other times I think as Dr. Trench does, and then I feel like Job — you know the quotation — the hair of my head stands up. A spirit passes before my face.

MRS. MALLET. Turn the key, Dr. Trench, we don't want anybody blundering in here. *[Dr. Trench locks door.]* Come and sit here, Miss Mackenna.

MISS MACKENNA. NO, I am going to sit beside Mr. Corbet.
[Corbet and Miss Mackenna sit down.

JOHN CORBET. YOU feel like Job to-night?

MISS MACKENNA. I feel that something is going to happen, that is why I am glad that you are a sceptic.

JOHN CORBET. You feel safer?

MISS MACKENNA. Yes, safer.

MRS. HENDERSON. I am glad to meet all my dear friends again and to welcome Mr. Corbet amongst us. As he is a stranger I must explain that we do not call up spirits: we make the right conditions and they come. I do not know who is going to come; sometimes there are a great many and the guides choose between them. The guides try to send somebody for everybody but do not always succeed. If you want to speak to some dear friend who has passed over, do not be discouraged. If your friend cannot come this time, maybe he can next time. My control is a dear little girl called Lulu who died when she was five or six years old. She describes the spirits present and tells us what spirit wants to speak. Miss Mackenna, a verse of a hymn, please, the same we had last time, and will everyone join in the singing?
[They sing the following lines from Hymn 564, Dublin Church Hymnal.
'Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear, It is not night if Thou be near:
O may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes.'
[Mrs. *Henderson is leaning back in her chair asleep.*

MISS MACKENNA *[to John Corbet].* She always snores like that when she is going off.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice]-* Lulu so glad to see all her friends.

MRS. MALLET. And we are glad you have come, Lulu.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* Lulu glad to see new friend.

MISS MACKENNA *[to John Corbet].* She is speaking to you.

JOHN CORBET. Thank you, Lulu.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* You mustn't laugh at the way I talk.

JOHN CORBET. I am not laughing, Lulu.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* Nobody must laugh. Lulu does her best but can't say big long words. Lulu sees a tall man here, lots of hair on face *[Mrs. Henderson passes her hands over her cheeks and chin],* not much on the top of his head *[Mrs. Henderson passes her hand over the top of her head],* red necktie, and such a funny sort of pin.

MRS. MALLET. Yes.... Yes....

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* Pin like a horseshoe.

MRS. MALLET. It's my husband.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* He has a message.

MRS. MALLET. Yes.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* Lulu cannot hear. He is too far off. He has come near. Lulu can hear now. He says... he says,
'Drive that man away!' He is pointing to somebody in the corner, that corner over there. He says it is the bad man who spoilt everything last time. If they won't drive him away, Lulu will scream.

MISS MACKENNA. That horrible spirit again.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. Last time he monopolised the séance.

MRS. MALLET. He would not let anybody speak but himself.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* They have driven that bad man away. Lulu sees a young lady.

MRS. MALLET. IS not my husband here?

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice],* Man with funny pin gone away. Young lady here — Lulu thinks she must be at a fancy dress party, such funny clothes, hair all in curls — all bent down on floor near that old man with glasses.

DR. TRENCH. NO, I do not recognize her.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in a child's voice].* That bad man, that bad old man in the corner, they have let him come back. Lulu is going to scream. *O.... O.... [In a man's voice.]* How dare you write to her? How dare you ask if we were married? How dare you question her?

DR. TRENCH. A soul in its agony — it cannot see us or hear us.

MRS. HENDERSON *[upright and rigid, only her lips moving, and still in a man's voice].* You sit crouching there. Did you not hear what I said? How dared you question her? I found you an ignorant little girl without intellect, without moral ambition. How many times did I not stay away from great men's houses, how many times forsake the Lord Treasurer, how many times neglect the business of the State that we might read Plutarch together! *[Abraham Johnson half rises. Dr. Trench motions him to remain seated.*

DR. TRENCH. Silence!

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. But, Dr. Trench...

DR. TRENCH. Hush — we can do nothing.

MRS. HENDERSON *[speaking as before*]. I taught you to think in every situation of life not as Hester Vanhomrigh would think in that situation, but as Cato or Brutus would, and now you behave like some common slut with her ear against the keyhole.

JOHN CORBET *[to* Miss *Mackenna].* It is Swift, Jonathan Swift, talking to the woman he called Vanessa. She was christened Hester Vanhomrigh.

MRS. HENDERSON *[in Vanessa's voice].* I questioned her, Jonathan, because I love. Why have you let me spend hours in your company if you did not want me to love you? *[In Swift's voice.]* When I rebuilt Rome in your mind it was as though I walked its streets. *[In Vanessa's voice.]* Was that all, Jonathan? Was I nothing but a painter's canvas? *[In Swift's voice.]* My God, do you think it was easy? I was a man of strong passions and I had sworn never to marry. *[In Vanessa's voice.]* If you and she are not married, why should we not marry like other men and women? I loved you from the first moment when you came to my mother's house and began to teach me. I thought it would be enough to look at you, to speak to you, to hear you speak. I followed you to Ireland five years ago and I can bear it no longer. It is not enough to look, to speak, to hear. Jonathan, Jonathan, I am a woman, the women Brutus and
Cato loved were not different. *[In Swift's voice.]* I have something in my blood that no child must inherit. I have constant attacks of dizziness; I pretend they come from a surfeit of fruit when I was a child. I had them in London.... There was a great doctor there, Dr. Arbuthnot; I told him of those attacks of dizziness, I told him of worse things. It was he who explained.

There is a line of Dryden's.... *[In Vanessa's voice.]* O, I know — 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied'. If you had children, Jonathan, my blood would make them healthy. I will take your hand, I will lay it upon my heart — upon the Vanhomrigh blood that has been healthy for generations. *[Mrs. Henderson slowly raises her left hand.]* That is the first time you have touched my body, Jonathan. [Mrs. *Henderson stands up and remains rigid. In Swift's voice.]* What do I care if it be healthy? What do I care if it could make mine healthy? Am I to add another to the healthy rascaldom and knavery of the world? *[In Vanessa's voice.]* Look at me, Jonathan. Your arrogant intellect separates us. Give me both your hands. I will put them upon my breast. *[Mrs. Henderson raises her right hand to the level of her left and then raises both to her breast.]* O, it is white — white as the gambler's dice — white ivory dice. Think of the uncertainty. Perhaps a mad child — perhaps a rascal — perhaps a knave — perhaps not, Jonathan. The dice of the intellect are loaded, but I am the common ivory dice. *[Her hands are stretched out as though drawing somebody towards her.]* It is not my hands that draw you back. My hands are weak, they could not draw you back if you did not love as I love. You said that you have strong passions; that is true, Jonathan — no man in Ireland is so passionate. That is why you need me, that is why you need children, nobody has greater need. You are growing old. An old man without children is very solitary. Even his friends, men as old as he, turn away, they turn towards the young, their children or their children's children. They cannot endure an old man like themselves. [Mrs. *Henderson moves away from the chair, her movements gradually growing convulsive.]* You are not too old for the dice, Jonathan, but a few years if you turn away will make you an old miserable childless man. *[In Swift's voice.] O* God, hear the prayer of Jonathan Swift, that afflicted man, and grant that he may leave to posterity nothing but his

intellect that came to him from Heaven.
[In Vanessa's voice.] Can you face solitude with that mind, Jonathan? [Mrs. *Henderson goes to the door, finds that it is closed.]*
Dice, white ivory dice. *[In Swift's voice.]* My God, I am left alone with my enemy. Who locked the door, who locked me in with my enemy? [Mrs. *Henderson beats upon the door, sinks to the floor and then speaks as Lulu.]* Bad old man! Do not let him come back. Bad old man does not know he is dead. Lulu cannot find fathers, mothers, sons that have passed over. Power almost gone. [Mrs. *Mallet leads Mrs. Henderson, who seems very exhausted, back to her chair. She is still asleep. She speaks again as Lulu.]* Another verse of hymn. Everybody sing. Hymn will bring good influence. *[They sing]*

'If some poor wandering child of Thine
Have spurned to-day the voice divine,
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin;
Let him no more lie down in sin.'

[During the hymn Mrs. Henderson has been murmuring 'Stella', *but the singing has almost drowned her voice. The singers draw one another's attention to the fact that she is speaking. The singing stops.]*

DR. TRENCH. I thought she was speaking.

MRS. MALLET. I saw her lips move.

DR. TRENCH. She would be more comfortable with a cushion, but we might wake her.

MRS. MALLET. Nothing can wake her out of a trance like that until she wakes up herself.
[She brings a cushion, and she and Dr. Trench put Mrs. Henderson into a more comfortable position.]

MRS. HENDERSON *[in Swift's voice],* Stella.

MISS MACKENNA *[to John Corbet].* Did you hear that? She said 'Stella'.

JOHN CORBET. Vanessa has gone, Stella has taken her place.

MISS MACKENNA. Did you notice the change while we were singing? The new influence in the room?

JOHN CORBET. I thought I did, but it must have been fancy.

MRS. MALLET. Hush!

MRS. HENDERSON *[in Swift's voice}.* Have I wronged you, beloved Stella? Are you unhappy? You have no children, you have no lover, you have no husband. A cross and ageing man for friend — nothing but that. But no, do not answer — you have answered already in that poem you wrote for my last birthday. With what scorn you speak of the common lot of women 'with no adornment but a face —

'Before the thirtieth year of life
A maid forlorn or hated wife.'

It is the thought of the great Chrysostom, who wrote in a famous passage that women loved according to the soul, loved as saints can love, keep their

beauty longer, have greater happiness than women loved according to the flesh. That thought has comforted me, but it is a terrible thing to be responsible for another's happiness. There are moments when I doubt, when I think Chrysostom may have been wrong. But now I have your poem to drive doubt away. You have addressed me in these noble words:

'You taught how I might youth prolong
By knowing what is right and wrong;
How from my heart to bring supplies
Of lustre to my fading eyes;
How soon a beauteous mind repairs
The loss of chang'd or falling hairs;
How wit and virtue from within
Can spread a smoothness o'er the skin.'

JOHN CORBET. The words upon the window-pane!

MRS. HENDERSON *[in Swift's voice].* Then, because you understand that I am afraid of solitude, afraid of outliving my friends — and myself — you comfort me in that last verse — you overpraise my moral nature when you attribute to it a rich mantle, but O how touching those words which describe your love:

'Late dying, may you cast a shred
Of that rich mantle o'er my head;
To bear with dignity my sorrow,
One day alone, then die to-morrow.'

Yes, you will close my eyes, Stella. O, you will live long after me, dear Stella, for you are still a young woman, but you will close my eyes. [Mrs.

Henderson sinks back in chair and speaks as Lulu.]
Bad old man gone. Power all used up. Lulu can do no more. Goodbye, friends. [Mrs. *Henderson, speaking in her own voice.}* Go away, go away! [*She wakes.]* I saw him a moment ago, has he spoilt the séance again?

MRS. MALLET. Yes, Mrs. Henderson, my husband came, but he was driven away.

DR. TRENCH. Mrs. Henderson is very tired. We must leave her to rest.
[To Mrs. *Henderson.]* You did your best and nobody can do more than that.
[He takes out money.

MRS. HENDERSON. No.... No.... I cannot take any money, not after a séance like that.

DR. TRENCH. Of course you must take it, Mrs. Henderson.
[He puts money on table, and Mrs. Henderson gives a furtive glance to see how much it is. She does the same as each sitter lays down his or her money.

MRS. MALLET. A bad séance is just as exhausting as a good séance, and you must be paid.

MRS. HENDERSON. NO.... No.... Please don't. It is very wrong to take money for such a failure.
[Mrs. *Mallet lays down money.*

CORNELIUS PATTERSON. A jockey is paid whether he wins or not.
[He lays down money.

MISS MACKENNA. That spirit rather thrilled me.
[She lays down money.

MRS. HENDERSON. If you insist, I must take it.

ABRAHAM JOHNSON. I shall pray for you to-night. I shall ask God to bless and protect your séances.
[He lays down money.
[All go out except John Corbet and Mrs. Henderson.

JOHN CORBET. I know you are tired, Mrs. Henderson, but I must speak to you. I have been deeply moved by what I have heard. This is my contribution to prove that I am satisfied, completely satisfied.
[He puts a note on the table.]

MRS. HENDERSON. A pound note — nobody ever gives me more than ten shillings, and yet the séance was a failure.

JOHN CORBET *[sitting down near Mrs. Henderson],* When I say I am satisfied I do not mean that I am convinced it was the work of spirits. I prefer to think that you created it all, that you are an accomplished actress and scholar. In my essay for my Cambridge doctorate I examine all the explanations of Swift's celibacy offered by his biographers and prove that the explanation you selected was the only plausible one. But there is something I must ask you.
Swift was the chief representative of the intellect of his epoch, that arrogant intellect free at last from superstition. He foresaw its collapse. He foresaw Democracy, he must have dreaded the future.
Did he refuse to beget children because of that dread? Was Swift mad? Or was it the intellect itself that was mad?

MRS. HENDERSON. Who are you talking of, sir?

JOHN CORBET. Swift, of course.

MRS. HENDERSON. Swift? I do not know anybody called Swift.

JOHN CORBET. Jonathan Swift, whose spirit seemed to be present tonight.

MRS. HENDERSON. What? That dirty old man?

JOHN CORBET. He was neither old nor dirty when Stella and Vanessa loved him.

MRS. HENDERSON. I saw him very clearly just as I woke up. His clothes were dirty, his face covered with boils. Some disease had made one of his eyes swell up, it stood out from his face like a hen's egg.

JOHN CORBET. He looked like that in his old age. Stella had been dead a long time. His brain had gone, his friends had deserted him.
The man appointed to take care of him beat him to keep him quiet.

MRS. HENDERSON. NOW they are old, now they are young. They change all in a moment as their thought changes. It is sometimes a terrible thing to be out of the body, God help us all.

DR. TRENCH *[at doorway].* Come along, Corbet. Mrs. Henderson is tired out.

JOHN CORBET. Good-bye, Mrs. Henderson.
[He goes out with Dr. Trench. All the sitters except Miss Mackenna, who has returned to her room, pass along the passage on their

way to the front door. Mrs. Henderson counts the money, finds her purse, which is in a vase on the mantelpiece, and puts the money in it.]

MRS. HENDERSON. HOW tired I am! I'd be the better of a cup of tea. *[She finds the teapot and puts kettle on fire, and then as she crouches down by the hearth suddenly lifts up her hands and counts her fingers, speaking in Swift's voice.]* Five great Ministers that were my friends are gone, ten great Ministers that were my friends are gone. I have not fingers enough to count the great Ministers that were my friends and that are gone. *[She wakes with a start and speaks in her own voice.]* Where did I put that tea-caddy? Ah! there it is. And there should be a cup and saucer. *[She finds the saucer.]* But where's the cup? *[She moves aimlessly about the stage and then, letting the saucer fall and break, speaks in Swift's voice.]*
Perish the day on which I was born!

Curtain

The Resurrection

To Junzo Sato

who gave me a sword

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

The Hebrew —
The Syrian
The Greek —
Christ
Three Musicians

THE RESURRECTION

Before I had finished this play I saw that its subject-matter might make it unsuited for the public stage in England or in Ireland. I had begun it with an ordinary stage scene in the mind's eye, curtained walls, a window and door at back, a curtained door at left. I now changed the stage directions and wrote songs for the unfolding and folding of the curtain that it might be played in a studio or a drawing-room like my dance plays, or at the Peacock Theatre before a specially chosen audience. If it is played at the Peacock Theatre the Musicians may sing the opening and closing songs, as they pull apart or pull together the proscenium curtain; the whole stage may be hung with curtains with an opening at the left. While the play is in progress the Musicians will sit towards the right of the audience, if at the Peacock, on the step which separates the stage from the audience, or one on either side of the proscenium.

[Song for the unfolding and folding of the curtain]

I

I saw a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side,
And lay the heart upon her hand
And bear that beating heart away;
And then did all the Muses sing
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,
As though God's death were but a play.

II

Another Troy must rise and set,
Another lineage feed the crow,

Another Argo's painted prow
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.
The Roman Empire stood appalled:
It dropped the reins of peace and war
When that fierce virgin and her Star
Out of the fabulous darkness called.

[The Hebrew is discovered alone upon the stage; he has a sword or spear. The Musicians make faint drum-taps, or sound a rattle; the Greek enters through the audience from the left.

THE HEBREW. Did you find out what the noise was?

THE GREEK. Yes, I asked a Rabbi.

THE HEBREW. Were you not afraid?

THE GREEK. HOW could he know that I am called a Christian? I wore the cap I brought from Alexandria. He said the followers of Dionysus were parading the streets with rattles and drums; that such a thing had never happened in this city before; that the Roman authorities were afraid to interfere. The followers of Dionysus have been out among the fields tearing a goat to pieces and drinking its blood, and are now wandering through the streets like a pack of wolves. The mob was so terrified of their frenzy that it left them alone, or, as seemed more likely, so busy hunting Christians it had time for nothing else. I turned to go, but he called me back and asked where I lived. When I said outside the gates, he asked if it was true that the dead had broken out of the cemeteries.

THE HEBREW. We can keep the mob off for some minutes, long enough for the Eleven to escape over the roofs. I shall defend the narrow stair between this and the street until I am killed, then you will take my place. Why is not the Syrian here?

THE GREEK. I met him at the door and sent him on a message; he will be back before long.

THE HEBREW. The three of us will be few enough for the work in hand.

THE GREEK *[glancing towards the opening at the left]*. What are they doing now?

THE HEBREW. While you were down below, James brought a loaf out of a bag, and Nathaniel found a skin of wine. They put them on the table. It was a long time since they had eaten anything. Then they began to speak in low voices, and John spoke of the last time they had eaten in that room.

THE GREEK. They were thirteen then.

THE HEBREW. He said that Jesus divided bread and wine amongst them. When John had spoken they sat still, nobody eating or drinking. If you stand here you will see them. That is Peter close to the window. He has been quite motionless for a long time, his head upon his breast.

THE GREEK. Is it true that when the soldier asked him if he were a follower of Jesus he denied it?

THE HEBREW. Yes, it is true. James told me. Peter told the others what he had done. But when the moment came they were all afraid. I must not

blame. I might have been no braver. What are we all but dogs who have lost their master?

THE GREEK. Yet you and I if the mob come will die rather than let it up that stair.

THE HEBREW. Ah! That is different. I am going to draw that curtain; they must not hear what I am going to say.
[He *draws curtain.]*

THE GREEK. I know what is in your mind.

THE HEBREW. They are afraid because they do not know what to think. When Jesus was taken they could no longer believe him the Messiah. We can find consolation, but for the Eleven it was always complete light or complete darkness.

THE GREEK. Because they are so much older.

THE HEBREW. No, no. You have only to look into their faces to see they were intended to be saints. They are unfitted for anything else. What makes you laugh?

THE GREEK. Something I can see through the window. There, where I am pointing. There, at the end of the street.
[They stand together looking out over the heads of the audience\]

THE HEBREW. I cannot see anything.

THE GREEK. The hill.

THE HEBREW. That is Calvary.

THE GREEK. And the three crosses on the top of it.
[He laughs again-]

THE HEBREW. Be quiet. You do not know what you are doing. You have gone out of your mind. You are laughing at Calvary.

THE GREEK. NO, no. I am laughing because they thought they were nailing the hands of a living man upon the Cross, and all the time there was nothing there but a phantom.

THE HEBREW. I saw him buried.

THE GREEK. We Greeks understand these things. No god has ever been buried; no god has ever suffered. Christ only seemed to be born, only seemed to eat, seemed to sleep, seemed to walk, seemed to die. I did not mean to tell you until I had proof.

THE HEBREW. Proof?

THE GREEK. I shall have proof before nightfall.

THE HEBREW. You talk wildly, but a masterless dog can bay the moon.

THE GREEK. No Jew can understand these things.

THE HEBREW. It is you who do not understand. It is I and those men in there, perhaps, who begin to understand at last. He was nothing more than a man, the best man who ever lived. Nobody before him had so pitied human misery. He preached the coming of the
Messiah because he thought the Messiah would take it all upon himself. Then some day when he was very tired, after a long journey perhaps, he

thought that he himself was the Messiah. He thought it because of all destinies it seemed the most terrible.

THE GREEK. How could a man think himself the Messiah?

THE HEBREW. It was always foretold that he would be born of a woman.

THE GREEK. To say that a god can be born of a woman, carried in her womb, fed upon her breast, washed as children are washed, is the most terrible blasphemy.

THE HEBREW. If the Messiah were not born of a woman he could not take away the sins of man. Every sin starts a stream of suffering, but the Messiah takes it all away.

THE GREEK. Every man's sins are his property. Nobody else has a right to them.

THE HEBREW. The Messiah is able to exhaust human suffering as though it were all gathered together in the spot of a burning-glass.

THE GREEK. That makes me shudder. The utmost possible suffering as an object of worship! You are morbid because your nation has no statues.

THE HEBREW. What I have described is what I thought until three days ago.

THE GREEK. I say that there is nothing in the tomb.

THE HEBREW. I saw him carried up the mountain and the tomb shut upon him.

THE GREEK. I have sent the Syrian to the tomb to prove that there is nothing there.

THE HEBREW. You knew the danger we were all in and yet you weakened our guard?

THE GREEK. I have risked the apostles' lives and our own. What I have sent the Syrian to find out is more important.

THE HEBREW. None of us are in our right mind to-day. I have got something in my own head that shocks me.

THE GREEK. Something you do not want to speak about?

THE HEBREW. I am glad that he was not the Messiah; we might all have been deceived to our lives' end, or learnt the truth too late.
One had to sacrifice everything that the divine suffering might, as it were, descend into one's mind and soul and make them pure.
[A sound of rattles and drums, at first in short bursts that come between sentences, but gradually growing continuous.] One had to give up all worldly knowledge, all ambition, do nothing of one's own will. Only the divine could have any reality. God had to take complete possession. It must be a terrible thing when one is old, and the tomb round the corner, to think of all the ambitions one has put aside; to think, perhaps, a great deal about women. I want to marry and have children.

THE GREEK *[who is standing facing the audience, and looking out over their heads].* It is the worshippers of Dionysus. They are under the window now. There is a group of women who carry upon their shoulders a bier with an image of the dead god upon it. No, they are not women. They are men

dressed as women. I have seen something like it in Alexandria. They are all silent, as if something were going to happen. My God! What a spectacle! In Alexandria a few men paint their lips vermilion. They imitate women that they may attain in worship a woman's self-abandonment. No great harm comes of it — but here! Come and look for yourself.

THE HEBREW. I will not look at such madmen.

THE GREEK. Though the music has stopped, some men are still dancing, and some of the dancers have gashed themselves with knives, imagining themselves, I suppose, at once the god and the Titans that murdered him. A little further off a man and woman are coupling in the middle of the street. She thinks the surrender to some man the dance threw into her arms may bring her god back to life. All are from the foreign quarter, to judge by face and costume, and are the most ignorant and excitable class of Asiatic Greeks, the dregs of the population. Such people suffer terribly and seek forgetfulness in monstrous ceremonies. Ah, that is what they were waiting for. The crowd has parted to make way for a singer. It is a girl. No, not a girl; a boy from the theatre. I know him. He acts girls' parts. He is dressed as a girl, but his finger-nails are gilded and his wig is made of gilded cords. He looks like a statue out of some temple. I remember something of the kind in Alexandria. Three days after the full moon, a full moon in March, they sing the death of the god and pray for his resurrection.
[One of the Musicians sings the following song]

Astrea's holy child!
A rattle in the wood
Where a Titan strode!
His rattle drew the child

Into that solitude.
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

[Drum-taps accompany and follow the words]

We wandering women,
Wives for all that come,
Tried to draw him home;
And every wandering woman
Beat upon a drum.
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

[Drum-taps as before]

But the murderous Titans
Where the woods grow dim
Stood and waited him.
The great hands of those Titans
Tore limb from limb.
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

[Drum-taps as before]

On virgin Astrea
That can succour all

Wandering women call;
Call out to Astrea
That the moon stood at the full.
Barrum, barrum, barrum.

[Drum-taps as before]

THE GREEK. I cannot think all that self-surrender and self-abasement is Greek, despite the Greek name of its god. When the goddess came to Achilles in the battle she did not interfere with his soul, she took him by his yellow hair. Lucretius thinks that the gods appear in the visions of the day and night but are indifferent to human fate; that, however, is the exaggeration of a Roman rhetorician. They can be discovered by contemplation, in their faces a high keen joy like the cry of a bat, and the man who lives heroically gives them the only earthly body that they covet. He, as it were, copies their gestures and their acts. What seems their indifference is but their eternal possession of themselves. Man, too, remains separate. He does not surrender his soul. He keeps his privacy.
[Drum-taps to represent knocking at the door]

THE HEBREW. There is someone at the door, but I dare not open with that crowd in the street.

THE GREEK. YOU need not be afraid. The crowd has begun to move away. *[The Hebrew goes down into the audience towards the left]*
I deduce from our great philosophers that a god can overwhelm man with disaster, take health and wealth away, but man keeps his privacy. If that is the Syrian he may bring such confirmation that mankind will never forget his words.

THE HEBREW *[from amongst the audience].* It is the Syrian. There is something wrong. He is ill or drunk.
[He helps the Syrian on to the stage-]

THE SYRIAN. I am like a drunken man. I can hardly stand upon my feet. Something incredible has happened. I have run all the way.

THE HEBREW. Well?

THE SYRIAN. I must tell the Eleven at once. Are they still in there? Everybody must be told.

THE HEBREW. What is it? Get your breath and speak.

THE SYRIAN. I was on my way to the tomb. I met the Galilean women, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the mother of James, and the other women. The younger women were pale with excitement and began to speak all together. I did not know what they were saying; but Mary the mother of James said that they had been to the tomb at daybreak and found that it was empty.

THE GREEK. Ah!

THE HEBREW. The tomb cannot be empty. I will not believe it.

THE SYRIAN. At the door stood a man all shining, and cried out that Christ had arisen. *[Faint drum-taps and the faint sound of a rattle]*
As they came down the mountain a man stood suddenly at their side; that man was Christ himself. They stooped down and kissed his feet. Now stand out of my way that I may tell Peter and James and John.

THE HEBREW *[standing before the curtained entrance of the inner room]* I will not stand out of the way.

THE SYRIAN. Did you hear what I said? Our master has arisen.

THE HEBREW. I will not have the Eleven disturbed for the dreams of women.

THE GREEK. The women were not dreaming. They told you the truth, and yet this man is in the right. He is in charge here. We must all be convinced before we speak to the Eleven.

THE SYRIAN. The Eleven will be able to judge better than we.

THE GREEK. Though we are so much younger we know more of the world than they do.

THE HEBREW. If you told your story they would no more believe it than I do, but Peter's misery would be increased. I have known him longer than you and I know what would happen. Peter would remember that the women did not flinch; that not one amongst them denied her master; that the dream proved their love and faith. Then he would remember that he had lacked both, and imagine that John was looking at him. He would turn away and bury his head in his hands.

THE GREEK. I said that we must all be convinced, but there is another reason why you must not tell them anything. Somebody else is coming. I am certain that Jesus never had a human body; that he is a phantom and can pass through that wall; that he will so pass; that he will pass through this room; that he himself will speak to the apostles.

THE SYRIAN. He is no phantom. We put a great stone over the mouth of the tomb, and the women say that it has been rolled back.

THE HEBREW. The Romans heard yesterday that some of our people planned to steal the body, and to put abroad a story that Christ had arisen; and so escape the shame of our defeat. They probably stole it in the night.

THE SYRIAN. The Romans put sentries at the tomb. The women found the sentries asleep. Christ had put them asleep that they might not see him move the stone.

THE GREEK. A hand without bones, without sinews, cannot move a stone.

THE SYRIAN. What matter if it contradicts all human knowledge? — another Argo seeks another fleece, another Troy is sacked.

THE GREEK. Why are you laughing?

THE SYRIAN. What is human knowledge?

THE GREEK. The knowledge that keeps the road from here to Persia free from robbers, that has built the beautiful humane cities, that has made the modern world, that stands between us and the barbarian.

THE SYRIAN. But what if there is something it cannot explain, something more important than anything else?

THE GREEK. You talk as if you wanted the barbarian back.

THE SYRIAN. What if there is always something that lies outside knowledge, outside order? What if at the moment when knowledge and

order seem complete that something appears?
[He begins to laugh.

THE HEBREW. Stop laughing.

THE SYRIAN. What if the irrational return? What if the circle begin again?

THE HEBREW. Stop! He laughed when he saw Calvary through the window, and now you laugh.

THE GREEK. He too has lost control of himself.

THE HEBREW. Stop, I tell you.
[Drums and rattles]

THE SYRIAN. But I am not laughing. It is the people out there who are laughing.

THE HEBREW. NO, they are shaking rattles and beating drums.

THE SYRIAN. I thought they were laughing. How horrible!

THE GREEK *[looking out over heads of audience]*- The worshippers of Dionysus are coming this way again. They have hidden their image of the dead god, and have begun their lunatic cry, 'God has arisen! God has arisen!' *[The Musicians who have been saying* 'God has arisen!' *fall silent]* They will cry 'God has arisen!' through all the streets of the city. They can make their god live and die at their pleasure; but why are they silent? They are dancing silently. They are coming nearer and nearer, dancing all the while, using some kind of ancient step unlike anything I have seen in Alexandria. They are almost under the window now.

THE HEBREW. They have come back to mock us, because their god arises every year, whereas our god is dead for ever.

THE GREEK. How they roll their painted eyes as the dance grows quicker and quicker! They are under the window. Why are they all suddenly motionless? Why are all those unseeing eyes turned upon this house? Is there anything strange about this house?

THE HEBREW. Somebody has come into the room.

THE GREEK. Where?

THE HEBREW. I do not know; but I thought I heard a step.

THE GREEK. I knew that he would come.

THE HEBREW. There is no one here. I shut the door at the foot of the steps.

THE GREEK. The curtain over there is moving.

THE HEBREW. No, it is quite still, and besides there is nothing behind it but a blank wall.

THE GREEK. Look, look!

THE HEBREW. Yes, it has begun to move.
[During what follows he backs in terror towards the left-hand corner of the stage-}

THE GREEK. There is someone coming through it.

[The figure of Christ wearing a recognisable but stylistic mask enters through the curtain. The Syrian slowly draws back the curtain that shuts off the inner room where the apostles are. The three young men are towards the left of the stage, the figure of Christ is at the back towards the right.

THE GREEK. It is the phantom of our master. Why are you afraid? He has been crucified and buried, but only in semblance, and is among us once more. *[The Hebrew kneels]* There is nothing here but a phantom, it has no flesh and blood. Because I know the truth I am not afraid. Look, I will touch it. It may be hard under my hand like a statue — I have heard of such things — or my hand may pass through it — but there is no flesh and blood. *[He goes slowly up to the figure and passes his hand over its side]* The heart of a phantom is beating! The heart of a phantom is beating!
[He screams. The figure of Christ crosses the stage and passes into the inner room.}

THE SYRIAN. He is standing in the midst of them. Some are afraid. He looks at Peter and James and John. He smiles. He has parted the clothes at his side. He shows them his side. There is a great wound there. Thomas has put his hand into the wound. He has put his hand where the heart is.

THE GREEK. O Athens, Alexandria, Rome, something has come to destroy you! The heart of a phantom is beating. Man has begun to die! Your words are clear at last, O Heraclitus. God and man die each other's life, live each other's death.

*[The Musicians rise, one or more singing the following words.
If the performance is in a private room or studio, they unfold and fold a curtain as in my dance plays; if at the Peacock Theatre, they draw the proscenium curtain across]*

I

In pity for man's darkening thought
He walked that room and issued thence
In Galilean turbulence;
The Babylonian starlight brought
A fabulous, formless darkness in;
Odour of blood when Christ was slain
Made all Platonic tolerance vain
And vain all Doric discipline.

II

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day:
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.

Curtain

The King of the Great Clock Tower

To

Ninette de Valois

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

First Attendant —
The King
Second Attendant —
The Queen
The Stroller

THE KING OF THE GREAT CLOCK TOWER

When the stage curtain rises it shows an inner curtain whereon is perhaps a stencilled pattern of dancers. At the right and left sides of the proscenium are a drum and gong. The Queen should wear a beautiful impassive mask; the Stroller, a wild half-savage mask. It should cover the upper part of his face, the lower part being hidden by his red beard. The Attendants stand by drum and gong; they slowly part the curtains, singing.

SECOND ATTENDANT. They dance all day that dance in Tir-nan-oge.

FIRST ATTENDANT. There every lover is a happy rogue;
And should he speak, it is the speech of birds.
No thought has he, and therefore has no words,
No thought because no clock, no clock because
If I consider deeply, lad and lass,
Nerve touching nerve upon that happy ground,
Are bobbins where all time is bound and wound.

SECOND ATTENDANT. O never may that dismal thread run loose;

FIRST ATTENDANT. For there the hound that Oisin saw pursues
The hornless deer that runs in such a fright;
And there the woman clasps an apple tight
For all the clamour of a famished man.
They run in foam, and there in foam they ran,
Nor can they stop to take a breath that still
Hear in the foam the beating of a bell.
[When the curtains are parted one sees to left the King and Queen upon two thrones, which may be two cubes. There should be two

cubes upon the opposite side to balance them.
The background may be a curtain hung in a semicircle, or a semicircle of one-foot Craig screens.
The two Attendants sit down by drum and gong. They remain facing the audience at either side of the stage, but a little in the shadow.

THE KING. A year ago you walked into this house,
A year ago to-night. Though neither I
Nor any man could tell your family,
Country or name, I put you on that throne.
And now before the assembled court, before
Neighbours, attendants, courtiers, men-at-arms,
I ask your country, name and family,
And not for the first time. Why sit you there
Dumb as an image made of wood or metal,
A screen between the living and the dead?
All persons here assembled, and because
They think that silence unendurable,
Fix eyes upon you.
[There is a pause. The Queen neither speaks nor moves. First Attendant strikes the drum three times.
Captain of the Guard!
Some traveller strikes a blow upon the gate.
Open. Admit him.

FIRST ATTENDANT *[speaking as Captain of the Guard, without turning his head],* I admit him, King.
The Stroller enters

THE KING. What is your name?

THE STROLLER. — Enough that I am called
A stroller and a fool, that you are called
King of the Great Clock Tower.

THE KING. — What do you want?

THE STROLLER. A year ago I heard a brawler say
That you had married with a woman called
Most beautiful of her sex. I am a poet.
From that day out I put her in my songs,
And day by day she grew more beautiful.
Hard-hearted men that plough the earth and sea
Sing what I sing, yet I that sang her first
Have never seen her face.

THE KING. — Have you no wife,
Mistress or friend to put into a song?

THE STROLLER. I had a wife. The image in my head
Made her appear fat, slow, thick of the limbs,
In all her movements like a Michaelmas goose.
I left her, but a night or two ago
I ate my sausage at a tavern table —
A stroller and a man of no account
I dine among the ganders — a gander scoffed,
Said I would drink myself to sleep, or cry
My head among the dishes on the table,
Because of a woman I had never seen.

THE KING. But what have I to do with it?

THE STROLLER. — Send for the Queen.
The ganders cannot scoff when I have seen her.

THE KING. He seems a most audacious brazen man,
Not caring what he speaks of, nor to whom,
Nor where he stands.

THE STROLLER. — But never have I said
Brazen, audacious, disrespectful words
Of the image in my head. Summon her in
That I may look on its original.

THE KING. She is at my side.

THE STROLLER. — The Queen of the Great Clock Tower?

THE KING. The Queen of the Great Clock Tower is at my side.

THE STROLLER. Neither so red, nor white, nor full in the breast
As I had thought. What matter for all that
So long as I proclaim her everywhere
Most beautiful!

THE KING. — GO now that you have seen!

THE STROLLER. Not yet, for on the night the gander gabbed
I swore that I would see the Queen, and that —
My God, but I was drunk — the Queen would dance
And dance to me alone.

THE KING. — What?

THE STROLLER. — Dance, and dance
Till I grow grateful, and grown grateful sing.

THE KING. Sing out you may, but not from gratitude.
Guard, flog this man!

THE STROLLER. — What, flog a sacred man?

THE KING. A sacred man?

THE STROLLER. — I ran to the Boyne Water
And where a sea-mew and the salt sea wind
Yelled Godhead, on a round green hillock lay;
Nine days I fasted there — but that's a secret
Between us three — then Aengus and the Gods
Appeared, and when I said what I had sworn
Shouted approval. Then great Aengus spoke —
O listen, for I speak his very words —
'On stroke of midnight when the old year dies,
Upon that stroke, the tolling of that bell,
The Queen shall kiss your mouth,' — his very words —
Your Queen, my mouth, the Queen shall kiss my mouth.

THE KING. Come, Captain of the Guard.

FIRST ATTENDANT
[speaking as Captain of the Guard]. King, I am here.

THE KING. This man insults me and insults the Queen.
Take him and bring me his head.

FIRST ATTENDANT
[speaking as Captain of the Guard]. I take him, King.

THE STROLLER. I go; but this must happen:
[Counting on his fingers]
First the Queen
Will dance before me, second I shall sing.

THE KING. What, sing without a head?

THE STROLLER. — Grateful I sing,
Then, grateful in her turn, the Queen will kiss
My mouth because it sang.

THE KING. — Stand where you are!
Stand! All from the beginning has been lies,
Extravagance and lies. Who is this man?
Perhaps if you will speak, and speak the truth,
I may not kill him. What? You will not speak?
Then take him, Captain of the Guard.

FIRST ATTENDANT *[speaking as Captain of the Guard].* I take him.

THE KING. And bring his head as evidence of his death.
If he was not your lover in that place
You come from, if the nothing that he seems,
A stroller and a fool, a rambling rogue
That has insulted you, laugh, dance or sing,

Do something, anything, I care not what
So that you move — but why those staring eyes?

SECOND ATTENDANT *[singing as Queen in a low voice].*
O what may come
Into my womb?

THE KING. Ah! That is better. Let the voice ring out.
Let everybody hear that song of joy.

SECOND ATTENDANT *[singing as Queen].*
He longs to kill
My body, until
That sudden shudder
And limbs lie still.

O, what may come
Into my womb,
What caterpillar
My beauty consume?

THE KING. I do not know the meaning of those words
That have a scornful sound.
[The King goes to right and returns with the head of the Stroller, and lays it upon the cubical throne to the right nearest audience.
Sing, Stroller and fool.
Open that mouth, my Queen awaits a song.
[The Queen begins to dance.
Dance, turn him into mockery with a dance!
No woman ever had a better thought.

All here applaud that thought. Dance, woman, dance!
Neither so red, nor white, nor full in the breast,
That's what he said! Dance, give him scorn for scorn,
Display your beauty, spread your peacock tail.
[The Queen dances, then takes up the severed head and stands in centre of the stage facing audience, the severed head upon her shoulder.

THE KING. His eyelids tremble, his lips begin to move.

FIRST ATTENDANT *[singing as Head in a low voice]*.
Clip and lip and long for more —

THE KING. O, O, they have begun to sing.

FIRST ATTENDANT *[singing as Head]*.
Clip and lip and long for more,
Mortal men our abstracts are;
What of the hands on the Great Clock face?
All those living wretches crave
Prerogatives of the dead that have
Sprung heroic from the grave.
A moment more and it tolls midnight.
Crossed fingers there in pleasure can
Exceed the nuptial bed of man;
What of the hands on the Great Clock face?
A nuptial bed exceed all that
Boys at puberty have thought,
Or sibyls in a frenzy sought.
A moment more and it tolls midnight.
What's prophesied? What marvel is

Where the dead and living kiss?
What of the hands on the Great Clock face?
Sacred Virgil never sang
All the marvel there begun,
But there's a stone upon my tongue.
A moment more and it tolls midnight.
[When the song has finished, the dance begins again, the Clock strikes. The strokes are represented by blows on a gong struck by Second Attendant. The Queen dances to the sound, and at the last stroke presses her lips to the lips of the head. The King has risen and drawn his sword. The Queen lays the head upon her breast, and fixes her eyes upon him. He appears about to strike, but kneels, laying the sword at her feet. The two Attendants rise singing, and slowly close the inner curtain.

FIRST ATTENDANT. O, but I saw a solemn sight;
Said the rambling, shambling travelling-man;
Castle Dargan's ruin all lit,
Lovely ladies dancing in it.

SECOND ATTENDANT. What though they danced! Those days are gone,
Said the wicked, crooked, hawthorn tree;
Lovely lady or gallant man
Are blown cold dust or a bit of bone.

FIRST ATTENDANT. O, what is life but a mouthful of air?
Said the rambling, shambling travelling-man;
Yet all the lovely things that were
Live, for I saw them dancing there.

[The Queen has come down stage and now stands framed in the half-closed curtains.

SECOND ATTENDANT. Nobody knows what may befall,
Said the wicked, crooked, hawthorn tree.
I have stood so long by a gap in the wall
Maybe I shall not die at all.
[The outer curtain descends]

ALTERNATIVE SONG FOR

THE SEVERED HEAD
Saddle and ride, I heard a man say,
Out of Ben Bulben and Knocknarea,
What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
All those tragic characters ride
But turn from Rosses' crawling tide,
The meet's upon the mountain side.
A slow low note and an iron bell.

What brought them there so far from their home,
Cuchulain that fought night long with the foam,
What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
Niam that rode on it; lad and lass
That sat so still and played at the chess?
What but heroic wantonness?
A slow low note and an iron bell.

Aleel, his Countess; Hanrahan
That seemed but a wild wenching man;

What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
And all alone comes riding there
The King that could make his people stare,
Because he had feathers instead of hair.
A slow low note and an iron bell.

Curtain

A Full Moon in March

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

First Attendant

The Queen

Second Attendant

The Swineherd

A FULL MOON IN MARCH

The Swineherd wears a half-savage mask covering the upper part of his face. He is bearded. When the inner curtain rises for the second time the player who has hitherto taken the part of the Queen is replaced by a dancer. When the stage curtain rises, two Attendants, an elderly woman and a young man, are discovered standing before an inner curtain.

FIRST ATTENDANT. What do we do?
What part do we take?
What did he say?

SECOND ATTENDANT. Join when we like,
Singing or speaking.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Before the curtain rises on the play?

SECOND ATTENDANT. Before it rises.

FIRST ATTENDANT. What do we sing?

SECOND ATTENDANT. ‘Sing anything, sing any old thing,’ said he.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Come then and sing about the dung of swine.
[They slowly part the inner curtain. The Second Attendant sings — the First Attendant may join in the singing at the end of the first or second verse. The First Attendant has a soprano, the Second a bass voice.

SECOND ATTENDANT.
Every loutish lad in love
Thinks his wisdom great enough,
What cares love for this and that?

To make all his parish stare,
As though Pythagoras wandered there.
Crown of gold or dung of swine.

Should old Pythagoras fall in love
Little may he boast thereof.
What cares love for this and that?
Days go by in foolishness.
O how great their sweetness is!
Crown of gold or dung of swine.

Open wide those gleaming eyes,
That can make the loutish wise.
What cares love for this and that?
Make a leader of the schools
Thank the Lord, all men are fools.
Crown of gold or dung of swine.
[They sit at one side of stage near audience. If they are musicians, they have beside them drum, flute and zither. The Queen is discovered seated and veiled.

THE QUEEN *[stretching and yawning].* What man is at the door?

SECOND ATTENDANT. Nobody, Queen.

THE QUEEN. Some man has come, some terrifying man,
For I have yawned and stretched myself three times.
Admit him, Captain of the Guard....

SECOND ATTENDANT *[speaking as Captain of the Guard],* He comes.
Enter the Swineherd

THE SWINEHERD. The beggars of my country say that he
That sings you best shall take you for a wife.

THE QUEEN. He that best sings his passion.

THE SWINEHERD. — And they say
The kingdom is added to the gift.

THE QUEEN. — I swore it.

THE SWINEHERD. But what if some blind aged cripple sing
Better than wholesome men?

THE QUEEN. — Some I reject.
Some I have punished for their impudence.
None I abhor can sing.

THE SWINEHERD. — SO that's the catch.
Queen, look at me, look long at these foul rags,
At hair more foul and ragged than my rags;
Look on my scratched foul flesh. Have I not come
Through dust and mire? There in the dust and mire
Beasts scratched my flesh; my memory too is gone,
Because great solitudes have driven me mad.
But when I look into a stream, the face
That trembles upon the surface makes me think
My origin more foul than rag or flesh.

THE QUEEN. But you have passed through perils for my sake;
Come a great distance. I permit the song.

THE SWINEHERD. Kingdom and lady, if I sing the best?
But who decides?

THE QUEEN. — I and my heart decide.
We say that song is best that moves us most.
No song has moved us yet.

THE SWINEHERD. — YOU must be won
At a full moon in March, those beggars say.
That moon has come, but I am here alone.

THE QUEEN. NO other man has come.

THE SWINEHERD. — The moon is full.

THE QUEEN. Remember through what perils you have come:
That I am crueller than solitude,
Forest or beast. Some I have killed or maimed
Because their singing put me in a rage,
And some because they came at all. Men hold
That woman's beauty is a kindly thing,
But they that call me cruel speak the truth,
Cruel as the winter of virginity.
But for a reason that I cannot guess
I would not harm you. Go before I change.
Why do you stand, your chin upon your breast?

THE SWINEHERD. My mind is running on our marriage night,
Imagining all from the first touch and kiss.

THE QUEEN. What gives you that strange confidence? What makes
You think that you can move my heart and me?

THE SWINEHERD. Because I look upon you without fear.

THE QUEEN. A lover in railing or in flattery said
God only looks upon me without fear.

THE SWINEHERD. Desiring cruelty, he made you cruel.
I shall embrace body and cruelty,
Desiring both as though I had made both.

THE QUEEN. One question more. You bring like all the rest
Some novel simile, some wild hyperbole
Praising my beauty?

THE SWINEHERD. — My memory has returned.
I tended swine, when I first heard your name.
I rolled among the dung of swine and laughed.
What do I know of beauty?

THE QUEEN. — Sing the best
And you are not a swineherd, but a king.

THE SWINEHERD. What do I know of kingdoms?
[Snapping his fingers]
That for kingdoms!

THE QUEEN. If trembling of my limbs or sudden tears
Proclaim your song beyond denial best,
I leave these corridors, this ancient house,
A famous throne, the reverence of servants —
What do I gain?

THE SWINEHERD. A song — the night of love,
An ignorant forest and the dung of swine.
[Queen leaves throne and comes down stage.

THE QUEEN. All here have heard the man and all have judged.
I led him, that I might not seem unjust,
From point to point, established in all eyes
That he came hither not to sing but to heap
Complexities of insult upon my head.

THE SWINEHERD. She shall bring forth her farrow in the dung.
But first my song — what nonsense shall I sing?

THE QUEEN. Send for the headsman, Captain of the Guard.

SECOND ATTENDANT *[speaking as Captain of the Guard].* I have already sent. He stands without.

THE QUEEN. I owe my thanks to God that this foul wretch,
Foul in his rags, his origin, his speech,
In spite of all his daring has not dared
Ask me to drop my veil. Insulted ears
Have heard and shuddered, but my face is pure.

Had it but known the insult of his eyes
I had torn it with these nails.

THE SWINEHERD *[going up stage].* Why should I ask?
What do those features matter? When I set out
I picked a number on the roulette wheel.
I trust the wheel, as every lover must.

THE QUEEN. Pray, if your savagery has learnt to pray,
For in a moment they will lead you out
Then bring your severed head.

THE SWINEHERD. — My severed head.
[Laughs.
There is a story in my country of a woman
That stood all bathed in blood — a drop of blood
Entered her womb and there begat a child.

THE QUEEN. A severed head! She took it in her hands;
She stood all bathed in blood; the blood begat.
O foul, foul, foul!

THE SWINEHERD. She sank in bridal sleep.

THE QUEEN. Her body in that sleep conceived a child.
Begone! I shall not see your face again.
[She turns towards him, her back to the audience, and slowly drops her veil. The Attendants close the inner curtain.

SECOND ATTENDANT. What do we sing?

FIRST ATTENDANT. — An ancient Irish Queen
That stuck a head upon a stake.

SECOND ATTENDANT. — Her lover's head;
But that's a different queen, a different story.

FIRST ATTENDANT. He had famished in a wilderness,
Braved lions for my sake,
And all men lie that say that I
Bade that swordsman take
His head from off his body
And set it on a stake.
He swore to sing my beauty
Though death itself forbade.
They lie that say, in mockery
Of all that lovers said,
Or in mere woman's cruelty
I bade them fetch his head.
[They begin to part the inner curtain.
O what innkeeper's daughter
Shared the Byzantine crown?
Girls that have governed cities,
Or burned great cities down,
Have bedded with their fancy-man
Whether a king or clown;
Gave their bodies, emptied purses
For praise of clown or king,
Gave all the love that women know!
O they had their fling,

But never stood before a stake
And heard the dead lips sing.
[The Queen is discovered standing exactly as before, the dropped veil at her side, but she holds above her head the severed head of the Swineherd. Her hands are red. There are red blotches upon her dress, not realistically represented: red gloves, some pattern of red cloth.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Her lips are moving.

SECOND ATTENDANT. — She has begun to sing.

FIRST ATTENDANT. I cannot hear what she is singing.
Ah, now I can hear.
[singing as Queen]
Child and darling, hear my song,
Never cry I did you wrong;
Cry that wrong came not from me
But my virgin cruelty.
Great my love before you came,
Greater when I loved in shame,
Greatest when there broke from me
Storm of virgin cruelty.
[The Queen dances to drum-taps and in the dance lays the head upon the throne.

SECOND ATTENDANT. She is waiting.

FIRST ATTENDANT. — She is waiting for his song.
The song he has come so many miles to sing.
She has forgotten that no dead man sings.

SECOND ATTENDANT *[laughs softly as Head].* He has begun to laugh.

FIRST ATTENDANT. NO; he has begun to sing.

SECOND ATTENDANT *[singing as Head].*
I sing a song of Jack and Jill.
Jill had murdered Jack;
The moon shone brightly;
Ran up the hill, and round the hill,
Round the hill and back.
A full moon in March.
Jack had a hollow heart, for Jill
Had hung his heart on high;
The moon shone brightly;
Had hung his heart beyond the hill,
A twinkle in the sky.
A full moon in March.
[The Queen in her dance moves away from the head, alluring and refusing.

FIRST ATTENDANT *[laughs as Queen].*

SECOND ATTENDANT. She is laughing. How can she laugh,
Loving the dead?

FIRST ATTENDANT. She is crazy. That is why she is laughing.
[Laughs again as Queen.
[Queen takes up the head and lays it upon the ground. She dances before it — a dance of adoration. She takes the head up and dances with it to drum-taps, which grow quicker and quicker. As *the drum-taps approach their climax, she presses her lips to the lips of the head. Her body shivers to very*

rapid drum-taps. The drum-taps cease. She sinks slowly down, holding the head to her breast. The Attendants close inner curtain singing and then stand one on either side while the stage curtain descends.

SECOND ATTENDANT. Why must those holy, haughty feet descend
From emblematic niches, and what hand
Ran that delicate raddle through their white?
My heart is broken, yet must understand.
What do they seek for? Why must they descend?

FIRST ATTENDANT. For desecration and the lover's night.

SECOND ATTENDANT. I cannot face that emblem of the moon
Nor eyelids that the unmixed heavens dart,
Nor stand upon my feet, so great a fright
Descends upon my savage, sunlit heart.
What can she lack whose emblem is the moon?

FIRST ATTENDANT. But desecration and the lover's night.

SECOND ATTENDANT. Delight my heart with sound; speak yet again.
But look and look with understanding eyes
Upon the pitchers that they carry; tight
Therein all time's completed treasure is:
What do they lack? O cry it out again.

FIRST ATTENDANT. Their desecration and the lover's night.

Curtain

The Herne's Egg

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Congal, *King of Connaugbt —*
Attracta, *A Priestess*
Aedh, *King of Tara —*
Kate, Agnes, Mary, *Friends*
Corney, *Attracta's servant of Attracta*
Mike, Pat, Malachi, Mathias, James
Soldiers of Tara
John, *Connaught soldiers —*
A Fool

THE HERNE'S EGG

SCENE I

Mist and rocks; high up on backcloth a rock, its base hidden in mist; on this rock stands a great heme. All should be suggested, not painted realistically. Many men fighting with swords and shields, but sword and sword, shield and sword, never meet. The men move rhythmically as if in a dance; when swords approach one another cymbals clash; when swords and shields approach drums boom. The battle flows out at one side; two Kings are left fighting in the centre of the stage; the battle returns and flows out at the other side. The two Kings remain, but are now face to face and motionless. They are Congal, King of Connaught, and Aedh, King of Tara.

CONGAL. HOW many men have you lost?

AEDH. Some five-and-twenty men.

CONGAL. NO need to ask my losses.

AEDH. Your losses equal mine.

CONGAL. They always have and must.

AEDH. Skill, strength, arms matched.

CONGAL. Where is the wound this time?

AEDH. There, left shoulder-blade.

CONGAL. Here, right shoulder-blade.

AEDH. Yet we have fought all day.

CONGAL. This is our fiftieth battle.

AEDH. And all were perfect battles.

CONGAL. Come, sit upon this stone.
Come and take breath awhile.

AEDH. From day-break until noon,
Hopping among these rocks.

CONGAL. Nothing to eat or drink.

AEDH. A story is running round
Concerning two rich fleas.

CONGAL. We hop like fleas, but war
Has taken all our riches.

AEDH. Rich, and rich, so rich that they
Retired and bought a dog.

CONGAL. Finish the tale and say
What kind of dog they bought.

AEDH. Heaven knows.

CONGAL. — YOU must have thought
What kind of dog they bought.

AEDH. Heaven knows.

CONGAL. — Unless you say,
I’ll up and fight all day.

AEDH. A fat, square, lazy dog,
No sort of scratching dog.

SCENE II

The same place as in previous scene. Corney enters, leading a donkey, a donkey on wheels like a child's toy, but life-size.

CORNEY. A tough, rough mane, a tougher skin,
Strong legs though somewhat thin,
A strong body, a level line
Up to the neck along the spine.
All good points, and all are spoilt
By that rapscallion Clareman's eye!
What if before your present shape
You could slit purses and break hearts,
You are a donkey now, a chattel,
A taker of blows, not a giver of blows.
No tricks, you're not in County Clare,
No, not one kick upon the shin.
Congal, Fat, Mike, James, Mathias, [Malachi], John, enter, in the dress and arms of the previous scene but without shields.

CONGAL. I have learned of a great hernery
Among these rocks, and that a woman,
Prophetess or priestess, named Attracta,
Owns it — take this donkey and man,
Look for the creels, pack them with eggs.

MIKE. Manners!

CONGAL. — This man is in the right.
I will ask Attracta for the eggs

If you will tell how to summon her.

CORNEY. A flute lies there upon the rock
Carved out of a heme's thigh.
Go pick it up and play the tune
My mother calls 'The Great Heme's Feather'.
If she has a mind to come, she will come.

CONGAL. That's a queer way of summoning.

CORNEY. This is a holy place and queer;
But if you do not know that tune,
Custom permits that I should play it,
But you must cross my hand with silver.
[Congal gives money, and Corney plays flute.

CONGAL. Go pack the donkey creels with eggs.
[All go out except Congal and Mike. Attracta enters.

ATTRACTA. For a thousand or ten thousand years,
For who can count so many years,
Some woman has lived among these rocks,
The Great Heme's bride, or promised bride,
And when a visitor has played the flute
Has come or not. What would you ask?

CONGAL. Tara and I have made a peace;
Our fiftieth battle fought, there is need
Of preparation for the next;
He and all his principal men,

I and all my principal men,
Take supper at his principal house
This night, in his principal city, Tara,
And we have set our minds upon
A certain novelty or relish.

MIKE. Heme's eggs.

CONGAL. — This man declares our need;
A donkey, both creels packed with eggs,
Somebody that knows the mind of a donkey
For donkey-boy.

ATTRACTA. — Custom forbids:
Only the women of these rocks,
Betrothed or married to the Heme,
The god or ancestor of hemes,
Can eat, handle, or look upon those eggs.

CONGAL. Refused! Must old campaigners lack
The one sole dish that takes their fancy,
My cooks what might have proved their skill,
Because a woman thinks that she
Is promised or married to a bird?

MIKE. Mad!

CONGAL. — Mad! This man is right,
But you are not to blame for that.
Women thrown into despair

By the winter of their virginity
Take its abominable snow,
As boys take common snow, and make
An image of god or bird or beast
To feed their sensuality:
Ovid had a literal mind,
And though he sang it neither knew
What lonely lust dragged down the gold
That crept on Danaë's lap, nor knew
What rose against the moony feathers
When Leda lay upon the grass.

ATTRACTA. There is no reality but the Great Heme.

MIKE. The cure.

CONGAL. — Why, that is easy said;
An old campaigner is the cure
For everything that woman dreams —
Even I myself, had I but time.

MIKE. Seven men.

CONGAL. — This man of learning means
That seven men packed into a day
Or dawdled out through seven years
And not a weather-stained, war-battered
Old campaigner such as I,
Are needed to melt down the snow
That's fallen among these wintry rocks.

ATTRACTA. There is no happiness but the Great Heme.

CONGAL. It may be that life is suffering,
But youth that has not yet known pleasure
Has not the right to say so; pick,
Or be picked by seven men,
And we shall talk it out again.

ATTRACTA. Being betrothed to the Great Heme
I know what may be known: I burn
Not in the flesh but in the mind;
Chosen out of all my kind
That I may lie in a blazing bed
And a bird take my maidenhead,
To the unbegotten I return,
All a womb and a funeral urn.
Enter Corney, Pat, James, Mathias, etc., with Donkey. A creel packed with eggs is painted upon the side of the Donkey.

CORNEY. Think of yourself; think of the songs:
Bride of the Heme, and the Great Heme's bride,
Grow terrible: go into a trance.

ATTRACTA. Stop!

CORNEY. — Bring the god out of your gut;
Stand there asleep until the rascals
Wriggle upon his beak like eels.

ATTRACTA. Stop!

CORNEY. — The country calls them rascals,
I, sacrilegious rascals that have taken
Every new-laid egg in the hernery.

ATTRACTA. Stop! When have I permitted you
To say what I may, or may not do?
But you and your donkey must obey
All big men who can say their say.

CONGAL. And bid him keep a civil tongue.

ATTRACTA. Those eggs are stolen from the god.
It is but right that you hear said
A curse so ancient that no man
Can say who made it, or any thing at all
But that it was nailed upon a post
Before a heme had stood on one leg.

CORNEY. Hemes must stand on one leg when they fish
In honour of the bird who made it.
“This they nailed upon a post
On the night my leg was lost,”
Said the old, old heme that had but one leg.

“He that a heme’s egg dare steal
Shall be changed into a fool,”
Said the old, old heme that had but one leg.
“And to end his fool breath
At a fool’s hand meet his death,”
Said the old, old heme that had but one leg.

I think it was the Great Heme made it
Pretending that he had but the one leg
To fool us all but Great Heme or another
It has not failed these thousand years.

CONGAL. That I shall live and die a fool,
And die upon some battlefield
At some fool's hand, is but natural,
And needs no curse to bring it.

MIKE. — Pickled!

CONGAL. He says that I am an old campaigner
Robber of sheepfolds and cattle trucks,
So cursed from morning until midnight
There is not a quarter of an inch
To plaster a new curse upon.

CORNEY. — Luck!

CONGAL. Adds that your luck begins when you
Recall that though we took those eggs
We paid with good advice; and then
Take to your bosom seven men.
[Congal, Mike, Corney, Mathias, James, [John, Malachi,]
and Donkey go out. Enter timidly three girls, Kate,
Agnes, Mary.

MARY. Have all those fierce men gone?

ATTRACTA. All those fierce men have gone.

AGNES. But they will come again?

ATTRACTA. NO, never again.

KATE. We bring three presents.
[All except Attracta kneel.

MARY. This is a jug of cream.

AGNES. This is a bowl of butter.

KATE. This is a basket of eggs.
[They lay jug, bowl and basket on the ground.

ATTRACTA. I know what you would ask.
Sit round upon these stones.
Children, why do you fear
A woman but little older,
A child yesterday?
All, when I am married,
Shall have good husbands. Kate
Shall marry a black-headed lad.

AGNES. She swore but yesterday
That she would marry black.

ATTRACTA. But Agnes there shall marry
A honey-coloured lad.

AGNES. O!

ATTRACTA. — Mary shall be married
When I myself am married
To the lad that is in her mind.

MARY. Are you not married yet?

ATTRACTA. NO. But it is almost come,
May come this very night.

MARY. And must he be all feathers?

AGNES. Have a terrible beak?

KATE. Great terrible claws?

ATTRACTA. Whatever shape he choose,
Though that be terrible,
Will best express his love.

AGNES. When he comes — will he? —

ATTRACTA. Child, ask what you please.

AGNES. DO all that a man does?

ATTRACTA. Strong sinew and soft flesh
Are foliage round the shaft
Before the arrowsmith
Has stripped it, and I pray
That I, all foliage gone,
May shoot into my joy —

[Sound of a flute, playing 'The Great Heme's Feather'.

MARY. Who plays upon that flute?

AGNES. Her god is calling her.

KATE. Look, look, she takes
An egg out of the basket.
My white hen laid it,
My favourite white hen.

MARY. Her eyes grow glassy, she moves
According to the notes of the flute.

AGNES. Her limbs grow rigid, she seems
A doll upon a wire.

MARY. Her human life is gone
And that is why she seems
A doll upon a wire.

AGNES. YOU mean that when she looks so
She is but a puppet?

MARY. HOW do I know? And yet
Twice have I seen her so,
She will move for certain minutes
As though her god were there
Thinking how best to move
A doll upon a wire.

Then she will move away
In long leaps as though
He had remembered his skill.
She has still my little egg.

AGNES. Who knows but your little egg
Comes into some mystery?

KATE. Some mystery to make
Love-loneliness more sweet.

AGNES. She has moved. She has moved away.

KATE. Travelling fast asleep
In long loops like a dancer.

MARY. Like a dancer, like a hare.

AGNES. The last time she went away
The moon was full — she returned
Before its side had flattened.

KATE. This time she will not return.

AGNES. Because she is called to her marriage?

KATE. Those leaps may carry her where
No woman has gone, and he
Extinguish sun, moon, star.
No bridal torch can burn
When his black midnight is there.

AGNES. I have heard her claim that they couple
In the blazing heart of the sun.

KATE. But you have heard it wrong!
In blue-black midnight they couple.

AGNES. NO, in the sun.

KATE. — Blue-black!

AGNES. In the sun!

KATE. — Blue-black, blue-black!

MARY. All I know is that she
Shall lie there in his bed,
Nor shall it end until
She lies there full of his might
His thunderbolts in her hand.

SCENE III

Before the gates of Tara, Congal, Mike, Pat, [Malachi, John,] James, Mathias, etc., soldiers of Congal, Corney, and the Donkey.

CONGAL. This is Tara; in a moment
Men must come out of the gate
With a great basket between them
And we give up our arms,
No armed man can enter.

CORNEY. And here is that great bird
Over our heads again.

PAT. The Great Heme himself
And he in a red rage.

MIKE. Stones.

CONGAL. — This man is right.
Beat him to death with stones.
[All go through the motion of picking up and throwing stones.
There are no stones except in so far as their gestures can suggest them.

PAT. All our stones fell wide.

CORNEY. He has come down so low
His legs are sweeping the grass.

MIKE. Swords.

CONGAL. This man is right.
Cut him up with swords.

PAT. I have him within my reach.

CONGAL. NO, no, he is here at my side.

CORNEY. His wing has touched my shoulder.

CONGAL. We missed him again and he
Rises again and sinks
Behind the wall of Tara.

[Two men come in carrying a large basket slung between two poles. One is whistling. All except Corney, who is unarmed, drop their swords and helmets into the basket. Each soldier when he takes off his helmet shows that he wears a skull-cap of soft cloth.

CONGAL. Where have I heard that tune?

MIKE. This morning.

CONGAL. — I know it now,
The tune of ‘The Great Heme’s Feather’.
It puts my teeth on edge.

SCENE IV

Banqueting ball. A throne painted on the back-cloth. Enter Congal, alone, drunk, and shouting.

CONGAL. To arms, to arms! Connaught to arms!
Insulted and betrayed, betrayed and insulted.
Who has insulted me? Tara has insulted.
To arms, to arms! Connaught to arms!
To arms — but if you have not got any
Take a table-leg or a candlestick,
A boot or a stool or any odd thing.
Who has betrayed me? Tara has betrayed!
To arms, to arms! Connaught to arms!

[He goes out to one side. Music, perhaps drum and concertina, to suggest breaking of wood. Enter at the other side, the King of Tara, drunk.

AEDH. Where is that beastly drunken liar
That says I have insulted him?
Congal enters with two table-legs.

CONGAL. I say it!

AEDH. — What insult?

CONGAL. — HOW dare you ask?
When I have had a common egg,
A common hen's egg put before me,
An egg dropped in the dirty straw
And crowed for by a cross-bred gangling cock,

And every other man at the table
A heme's egg.
[Throws a table-leg on the floor.
There is your weapon. Take it!
Take it up, defend yourself.
An egg that some half-witted slattern
Spat upon and wiped in her apron!

AEDH. A servant put the wrong egg there.

CONGAL. But at whose orders?

AEDH. — At your own.
A murderous drunken plot, a plot
To put a weapon that I do not know
Into my hands.

CONGAL. — Take up that weapon.
If I am as drunken as you say,
And you as sober as you think,
A coward and a drunkard are well matched.

[Aedh takes up the table-leg. Connaught and Tara soldiers come in, they fight, and the fight sways to and fro. The weapons, table-legs, candlesticks, etc., do not touch. Drum-taps represent blows. All go out fighting. Enter Pat, drunk, with bottle.

PAT. Heme's egg, hen's egg, great difference.
There's insult in that difference.
What do hens eat? Hens live upon mash,

Upon slop, upon kitchen odds and ends.
What do hemes eat? Hemes live on eels,
On things that must always run about.
Man's a high animal and runs about,
But mash is low, O, very low.
Or, to speak like a philosopher,
When a man expects the movable
But gets the immovable, he is insulted.
Enter Congal, Peter, Malachi, Mathias, etc.

CONGAL. Tara knew that he was overmatched;
Knew from the start he had no chance;
Died of a broken head; died drunk;
Accused me with his dying breath
Of secretly practising with a table-leg,
Practising at midnight until I
Became a perfect master with the weapon.
But that is all lies.

PAT. — Let all men know
He was a noble character
And I must weep at his funeral.

CONGAL. He insulted me with a hen's egg,
Said I had practised with a table-leg,
But I have taken kingdom and throne
And that has made all level again
And I can weep at his funeral.
I would not have had him die that way

Or die at all, he should have been immortal.
Our fifty battles had made us friends.
And there are fifty more to come.
New weapons, a new leader will be found
And everything begin again.

MIKE. Much bloodier.

CONGAL. — They had, we had
Forgotten what we fought about,
So fought like gentlemen, but now
Knowing the truth must fight like the beasts.
Maybe the Great Heme's curse has done it.
Why not? Answer me that; why not?

MIKE. Horror henceforth.

CONGAL. — This wise man means
We fought so long like gentlemen
That we grew blind.
Attracta enters, walking in her sleep, a heme's egg in her hand.
She stands near the throne and holds her egg towards it for a moment.

MATHIAS. — Look! Look!
She offers that egg. Who is to take it?

CONGAL. She walks with open eyes but in her sleep.

MATHIAS. I can see it all in a flash.
She found that heme's egg on the table
And left the hen's egg there instead.

JAMES. She brought the hen's egg on purpose
Walking in her wicked sleep.

CONGAL. And if I take that egg, she wakes,
Completes her task, her circle;
We all complete a task or circle,
Want a woman, then all goes — pff.
[He goes to take the egg.

MIKE. Not now.

CONGAL. — This wise man says 'not now'.
There must be something to consider first.

JAMES. By changing one egg for another
She has brought bloodshed on us all.

PAT. He was a noble character,
And I must weep at his funeral.

JAMES. I say that she must die, I say,
According to what my mother said,
All that have done what she did must die,
But, in a manner of speaking, pleasantly,
Because legally, certainly not
By beating with a table-leg
As though she were a mere Tara man
Nor yet by beating with a stone
As though she were the Great Heme himself.

MIKE. The Great Heme's bride.

CONGAL. — I had forgotten
That all she does he makes her do,
But he is god and out of reach;
Nor stone can bruise, nor a sword pierce him,
And yet through his betrothed, his bride,
I have the power to make him suffer;
His curse has given me the right,
I am to play the fool and die
At a fool's hands.

MIKE. — Seven men.
[He begins to count, seeming to strike the table with the tableleg, but table and table-leg must not meet, the blow is represented by the sound of the drum.
One, two, three, four,
Five, six, seven men.

PAT. Seven that are present in this room,
Seven that must weep at his funeral.

CONGAL. This man who struck those seven blows
Means that we seven in the name of the law
Must handle, penetrate, and possess her,
And do her a great good by that action,
Melting out the virgin snow,
And that snow image, the Great Heme;
For nothing less than seven men
Can melt that snow, but when it melts
She may, being free from all obsession,

Live as every woman should.
I am the Court; judgement has been given.
I name the seven: Congal of Tara,
Patrick, Malachi, Mike, John, James,
And that coarse hulk of clay, Mathias.

MATHIAS. I dare not lay a hand upon that woman.
The people say that she is holy
And carries a great devil in her gut.

PAT. What mischief can a Munster devil
Do to a man that was born in Connaught?

MALACHI. I made a promise to my mother
When we set out on this campaign
To keep from women.

JOHN. — I have a wife that's jealous
If I but look the moon in the face.

JAMES. I am promised to an educated girl.
Her family are most particular,
What would they say — O my God!

CONGAL. Whoever disobeys the Court
Is an unmannerly, disloyal lout,
And no good citizen.

PAT. — Here is my bottle.
Pass it along, a long, long pull;
Although it's round like a woman carrying,

No unmannerly, disloyal bottle,
An affable, most loyal bottle.
[All drink.

MATHIAS. I first.

CONGAL. — That's for the Court to say.
A Court of Law is a blessed thing,
Logic, Mathematics, ground in one,
And everything out of balance accursed.
When the Court decides on a decree
Men carry it out with dignity.
Here where I put down my hand
I will put a mark, then all must stand
Over there in a level row.
And all take off their caps and throw.
The nearest cap shall take her first,
The next shall take her next; so on
Till all is in good order done.
I need a mark and so must take
The heme's egg, and let her wake.

[He takes egg and lays it upon the ground. Attracta stands motionless, looking straight in front of her. She sings. The seven standing in a row throw their caps one after another.

ATTRACTA. When I take a beast to my joyful breast,
Though beak and claw I must endure,
Sang the bride of the Heme, and the Great Heme's bride,
No lesser life, man, bird or beast,

Can make unblessed what a beast made blessed,
Can make impure what a beast made pure.
Where is he gone, where is that other,
He that shall take my maidenhead?
Sang the bride of the Heme, and the Great Heme's bride,
Out of the moon came my pale brother,
The blue-black midnight is my mother.
Who will turn down the sheets of the bed?
When beak and claw their work begin
Shall horror stir in the roots of my hair?
Sang the bride of the Heme and the Great Heme's bride,
And who lie there in the cold dawn
When all that terror has come and gone?
Shall I be the woman lying there?

SCENE V

Before the Gate of Tara. Corney enters with Donkey.

CORNEY. YOU thought to go on sleeping though dawn was up,
Rapscallion of a beast, old highwayman.
That light in the eastern sky is dawn,
You cannot deny it; many a time
You looked upon it following your trade.
Cheer up, we shall be home before sunset.
Attracta comes in.

ATTRACTA. I have packed all the uneaten or unbroken eggs
Into the creels, help carry them
And hang them on the donkey's back.

CORNEY. We could boil them hard and keep them in the larder,
But Congal has had them all boiled soft.

ATTRACTA. Such eggs are holy. Many pure souls
Especially among the country people
Would shudder if heme's eggs were left
For foul-tongued, bloody-minded men.
Congal, Malachi, Mike, etc., enter.

CONGAL. A sensible woman, you gather up what's left,
Your thoughts upon the cupboard and the larder.
No more a heme's bride, a crazed loony
Waiting to be trodden by a bird,
But all woman, all sensible woman.

MIKE. Manners.

CONGAL. — This man who is always right
Desires that I should add these words,
The seven that held you in their arms last night
Wish you good luck.

ATTRACTA. — What do you say?
My husband came to me in the night.

CONGAL. Seven men lay with you in the night.
Go home desiring and desirable,
And look for a man.

ATTRACTA. — The Heme is my husband.
I lay beside him, his pure bride.

CONGAL. Pure in the embrace of seven men?

MIKE. She slept.

CONGAL. — You say that though I thought,
Because I took the egg out of her hand,
That she awoke, she did not wake
Until day broke upon her sleep —
Her sleep and ours — did she wake pure?
Seven men can answer that.

CORNEY. King though you are, I will not hear
The bride of the Great Heme defamed —
A king, a king but a Mayo man.

A Mayo man’s lying tongue can beat
A Clare highwayman’s rapscallion eye,
Seven times a liar.

MIKE. — Seven men.

CONGAL. I, Congal, lay with her last night.

MATHIAS. And I, Mathias.

MIKE. — And I.

JAMES. — And I.

MALACHI. And I.

JOHN. — And I.

PAT. — And I; swear it;
And not a drop of drink since dawn.

CORNEY. One plain liar, six men bribed to lie.

ATTRACTA. Great Heme, Great Heme, Great Heme,
Your darling is crying out.
Great Heme, declare her pure,
Pure as that beak and claw,
Great Heme, Great Heme, Great Heme,
Let the round heaven declare it.

[Silence. Then low thunder growing louder. All except Attracta and Congal kneel.

JAMES. Great Heme, I swear that she is pure;
I never laid a hand upon her.

MATHIAS. I was a fool to believe myself
When everybody knows that I am a liar.

PAT. Even when it seemed that I covered her
I swear that I knew it was the drink.

ATTRACTA. I lay in the bride-bed,
His thunderbolts in my hand,
But gave them back, for he,
My lover, the Great Heme,
Knows everything that is said
And every man's intent,
And every man's deed; and he
Shall give these seven that say
That they upon me lay
A most memorable punishment.

[It thunders. All prostrate themselves except Attracta and Congal. Congal had half knelt, but he has stood up again.

ATTRACTA. I share his knowledge, and I know
Every punishment decreed.
He will come when you are dead,
Push you down a step or two
Into cat or rat or bat,
Into dog or wolf or goose.
Everybody in his new shape I can see,

But Congal there stands in a cloud
Because his fate is not yet settled.
Speak out, Great Heme, and make it known
That everything I have said is true.
[Thunder. All now, except Attracta, have prostrated themselves.

ATTRACTA. What has made you kneel?

CONGAL. — This man
That's prostrate at my side would say,
Could he say anything at all,
That I am terrified by thunder.

ATTRACTA. Why did you stand up so long?

CONGAL. I held you in my arms last night,
We seven held you in our arms.

ATTRACTA. YOU were under the curse, in all
You did, in all you seemed to do.

CONGAL. If I must die at a fool's hand,
When must I die?

ATTRACTA. — When the moon is full.

CONGAL. And where?

ATTRACTA. — Upon the holy mountain,
Upon Slieve Fuadh, there we meet again
Just as the moon comes round the hill.

There all the gods must visit me,
Acknowledging my marriage to a god;
One man will I have among the gods.

CONGAL. I know the place and I will come,
Although it be my death, I will come.
Because I am terrified, I will come.

SCENE VI

A mountain-top, the moon has just risen; the moon of comic tradition, a round smiling face. A cauldron lid, a cooking-pot, and a spit lie together at one side of the stage. The Fool, a man in ragged clothes, enters carrying a large stone; he lays it down at one side and goes out. Congal enters carrying a wine-skin, and stands at the other side of the stage. The Fool re-enters with a second large stone which he places beside the first.

CONGAL. What is your name, boy?

FOOL. — Poor Tom Fool.
Everybody knows Tom Fool.

CONGAL. I saw something in the mist,
There lower down upon the slope,
I went up close to it and saw
A donkey, somebody's stray donkey.
A donkey and a Fool — I don't like it at all.

FOOL. I won't be Tom the Fool after to-night.
I have made a level patch out there,
Clearing away the stones, and there
I shall fight a man and kill a man
And get great glory.

CONGAL. — Where did you get
The cauldron lid, the pot and the spit?

FOOL. I sat in Widow Rooney's kitchen,
Somebody said, 'King Congal's on the mountain

Cursed to die at the hands of a fool'.
Somebody else said 'Kill him, Tom'.
And everybody began to laugh
And said I should kill him at the full moon,
And that is to-night.

CONGAL. — I too have heard
That Congal is to die to-night.
Take a drink.

FOOL. — I took this lid,
And all the women screamed at me.
I took the spit, and all screamed worse.
A shoulder of lamb stood ready for the roasting —
I put the pot upon my head.
They did not scream but stood and gaped.
[Fool arms himself with spit, cauldron lid and pot, whistling 'The Great Heme's Feather'.

CONGAL. Hush, for that is an unlucky tune.
And why must you kill Congal, Fool?
What harm has he done you?

FOOL. — None at all.
But there's a Fool called Johnny from Meath,
We are great rivals and we hate each other,
But I can get the pennies if I kill Congal,
And Johnny nothing.

CONGAL. — I am King Congal,
And is not that a thing to laugh at, Fool?

FOOL. Very nice, O very nice indeed,
For I can kill you now, and I
Am tired of walking.

CONGAL. — Both need rest.
Another drink apiece — that is done —
Lead to the place you have cleared of stones.

FOOL. But where is your sword? You have not got a sword.

CONGAL. I lost it, or I never had it,
Or threw it at the strange donkey below,
But that's no matter — I have hands.
[They go out at one side. Attracta, Corney and Donkey come in. Attracta sings.

ATTRACTA. When beak and claw their work began
What horror stirred in the roots of my hair?
Sang the bride of the Heme, and the Great Heme's bride.
But who lay there in the cold dawn,
When all that terror had come and gone?
Was I the woman lying there?
[They go out. Congal and Tom the Fool come. Congal is carrying the cauldron lid, pot and spit. He lays them down.

CONGAL. I was sent to die at the hands of a Fool.
There must be another Fool on the mountain.

FOOL. That must be Johnny from Meath.
But that's a thing I could not endure,
For Johnny would get all the pennies.

CONGAL. Here, take a drink and have no fear;
All's plain at last; though I shall die
I shall not die at a Fool's hand.
I have thought out a better plan.
I and the Heme have had three bouts,
He won the first, I won the second,
Six men and I possessed his wife.

FOOL. I ran after a woman once.
I had seen two donkeys in a field.

CONGAL. And did you get her, did you get her, Fool?

FOOL. I almost had my hand upon her.
She screamed, and somebody came and beat me.
Were you beaten?

CONGAL. — NO, no, Fool.
But she said that nobody had touched her,
And after that the thunder said the same,
Yet I had won that bout, and now
I know that I shall win the third.

FOOL. If Johnny from Meath comes, kill him!

CONGAL. Maybe I will, maybe I will not.

FOOL. You let me off, but don't let him off.

CONGAL. I could not do you any harm,
For you and I are friends.

FOOL. — Kill Johnny!

CONGAL. Because you have asked me to, I will do it,
For you and I are friends.

FOOL. — Kill Johnny!
Kill with the spear, but give it to me
That I may see if it is sharp enough.
[Fool takes spit.

CONGAL. And is it, Fool?

FOOL. — I spent an hour
Sharpening it upon a stone.
Could I kill you now?

CONGAL. — Maybe you could.

FOOL. I will get all the pennies for myself.
[He wounds Congal. The wounding is symbolised by a movement of the spit towards or over Congal's body.

CONGAL. It passed out of your mind for a moment
That we are friends, but that is natural.

FOOL *[dropping spit].* I must see it, I never saw a wound.

CONGAL. The Heme has got the first blow in;
A scratch, a scratch, a mere nothing.
But had it been a little deeper and higher
It would have gone through the heart, and maybe
That would have left me better off,
For the Great Heme may beat me in the end.
Here I must sit through the full moon,
And he will send up Fools against me,
Meandering, roaring, yelling,
Whispering Fools, then chattering Fools,
And after that morose, melancholy,
Sluggish, fat, silent Fools;
And I, moon-crazed, moon-blind,
Fighting and wounded, wounded and fighting.
I never thought of such an end.
Never be a soldier, Tom;
Though it begins well, is this a life?
If this is a man's life, is there any life
But a dog's life?

FOOL. — That's it, that's it;
Many a time they have put a dog at me.

CONGAL. If I should give myself a wound,
Let life run away, I'd win the bout.
He said I must die at the hands of a Fool
And sent you hither. Give me that spit!
I put it in this crevice of the rock,
That I may fall upon the point.

These stones will keep it sticking upright.
[They arrange stones, he puts the spit in.

CONGAL *[almost screaming in his excitement].*
Fool! Am I myself a Fool?
For if I am a Fool, he wins the bout.

FOOL. YOU are King of Connaught. If you were a fool
They would have chased you with their dogs.

CONGAL. I am King Congal of Connaught and of Tara,
That wise, victorious, voluble, unlucky,
Blasphemous, famous, infamous man.
Fool, take this spit when red with blood,
Show it to the people and get all the pennies;
What does it matter what they think?
The Great Heme knows that I have won.
[He falls symbolically upon the spit. It does not touch him.
Fool takes the spit and wine-skin and goes out.
It seems that I am hard to kill,
But the wound is deep. Are you up there?
Your chosen kitchen spit has killed me,
But killed me at my own will, not yours.
Attracta and Corney enter.

ATTRACTA. Will the knot hold?

CORNEY. — There was a look
About the old highwayman's eye of him
That warned me, so I made him fast

To that old stump among the rocks
With a great knot that he can neither
Break, nor pull apart with his teeth.

CONGAL. Attracta!

ATTRACTA. — I called you to this place,
You came, and now the story is finished.

CONGAL. YOU have great powers, even the thunder
Does whatever you bid it do.
Protect me, I have won my bout,
But I am afraid of what the Heme
May do with me when I am dead.
I am afraid that he may put me
Into the shape of a brute beast.

ATTRACTA. I will protect you if, as I think,
Your shape is not yet fixed upon.

CONGAL. I am slipping now, and you up there
With your long leg and your long beak.
But I have beaten you, Great Heme,
In spite of your kitchen spit — seven men —
[He dies.

ATTRACTA. Come lie with me upon the ground,
Come quickly into my arms, come quickly, come
Before his body has had time to cool.

CORNEY. What? Lie with you?

ATTRACTA. — Lie and beget,
If you are afraid of the Great Heme,
Put that away, for if I do his will,
You are his instrument or himself.

CORNEY. The thunder has me terrified.

ATTRACTA. I lay with the Great Heme, and he,
Being all a spirit, but begot
His image in the mirror of my spirit,
Being all sufficient to himself
Begot himself; but there's a work
That should be done, and that work needs
No bird's beak nor claw but a man,
The imperfection of a man.
[The sound of a donkey braying.

CORNEY. The donkey is braying.
He has some wickedness in his mind.

ATTRACTA. Too late, too late, he broke that knot,
And there, down there among the rocks
He couples with another donkey.
That donkey has conceived. I thought that I
Could give a human form to Congal,
But now he must be born a donkey.

CORNEY. King Congal must be born a donkey!

ATTRACTA. Because we were not quick enough.

CORNEY. I have heard that a donkey carries its young
Longer than any other beast,
Thirteen months it must carry it.
[He laughs.
All that trouble and nothing to show for it,
Nothing but just another donkey.

Curtain

Purgatory

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A Boy —
An Old Man

PURGATORY

A *ruined house and a bare tree in the background.*

BOY. Half door, hall door
Hither and thither, day and night,
Hill or hollow, shouldering this pack,
Hearing you talk.

OLD MAN. — Study that house.
I think about its jokes and stories;
I try to remember what the butler
Said to a drunken gamekeeper
In mid-October, but I cannot.
If I cannot, none living can.
Where are the jokes and stories of a house,
Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty?

BOY. SO you have come this path before?

OLD MAN. The moonlight falls upon the path,
The shadow of a cloud upon the house
And that's symbolical; study that tree,
What is it like?

BOY. — A silly old man.

OLD MAN. It's like — no matter what it's like.
I saw it a year ago stripped bare as now,
I saw it fifty years ago
Before the thunder-bolt had riven it,

Green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter,
Fat greasy life. Stand there and look,
Because there is somebody in that house.
[The Boy puts down pack and stands in the doorway.

BOY. There's nobody here.

OLD MAN. — There's somebody there.

BOY. The floor is gone, the windows gone,
And where there should be roof there's sky,
And here's a bit of an egg-shell thrown
Out of a jackdaw's nest.

OLD MAN. — But there are some
That do not care what's gone, what's left,
The souls in Purgatory that come back
To habitations and familiar spots.

BOY. Your wits are out again.

OLD MAN. — Re-live
Their transgressions, and that not once
But many times; they know at last
The consequence of those transgressions
Whether upon others, or upon themselves;
Upon others, others may bring help
For when the consequence is at an end
The dream must end; upon themselves,

There is no help but in themselves
And in the mercy of God.

BOY. — I have had enough!
Talk to the jackdaws, if talk you must.

OLD MAN. Stop! Sit there upon that stone.
That is the house where I was born.

BOY. The big old house that was burnt down?

OLD MAN. My mother that was your grand-dam owned it,
This scenery and this countryside,
Kennel and stable, horse and hound —
She had a horse at the Curragh, and there met
My father, a groom in a training stable;
Looked at him and married him.
Her mother never spoke to her again,
And she did right.

BOY. — What's right and wrong?
My grand-dad got the girl and the money.

OLD MAN. Looked at him and married him,
And he squandered everything she had.
She never knew the worst, because
She died in giving birth to me,
But now she knows it all, being dead.
Great people lived and died in this house;
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,

Captains and governors, and long ago
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.
Some that had gone on government work
To London or to India came home to die,
Or came from London every spring
To look at the may-blossom in the park.
They had loved the trees that he cut down
To pay what he had lost at cards
Or spent on horses, drink and women;
Had loved the house, had loved all
The intricate passages of the house,
But he killed the house; to kill a house
Where great men grew up, married, died,
I here declare a capital offence.

BOY. My God, but you had luck. Grand clothes,
And maybe a grand horse to ride.

OLD MAN. That he might keep me upon his level
He never sent me to school, but some
Half-loved me for my half of her.
A gamekeeper's wife taught me to read,
A Catholic curate taught me Latin.
There were old books and books made fine
By eighteenth century French binding, books
Modern and ancient, books by the ton.

BOY. What education have you given me?

OLD MAN. I gave the education that befits
A bastard that a pedlar got
Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch.
When I had come to sixteen years old
My father burned down the house when drunk.

BOY. But that is my age, sixteen years old
At the Puck Fair.

OLD MAN. — And everything was burnt;
Books, library, all were burnt.

BOY. IS what I have heard upon the road the truth,
That you killed him in the burning house?

OLD MAN. There's nobody here but our two selves?

BOY. Nobody, Father.

OLD MAN. — I stuck him with a knife,
That knife that cuts my dinner now,
And after that I left him in the fire;
They dragged him out, somebody saw
The knife-wound but could not be certain
Because the body was all black and charred.
Then some that were his drunken friends
Swore they would put me upon trial,
Spoke of quarrels, a threat I had made.
The gamekeeper gave me some old clothes,
I ran away, worked here and there

Till I became a pedlar on the roads,
No good trade, but good enough
Because I am my father's son,
Because of what I did or may do.
Listen to the hoof beats! Listen, listen!

BOY. I cannot hear a sound.

OLD MAN. — Beat! Beat!
This night is the anniversary
Of my mother's wedding night,
Or of the night wherein I was begotten.
My father is riding from the public house
A whiskey bottle under his arm.
[A *window is lit showing a young girl.*
Look at the window; she stands there
Listening, the servants are all in bed,
She is alone, he has stayed late
Bragging and drinking in the public house.

BOY. There's nothing but an empty gap in the wall.
You have made it up. No, you are mad!
You are getting madder every day.

OLD MAN. It's louder now because he rides
Upon a gravelled avenue
All grass to-day. The hoof beat stops,
He has gone to the other side of the house,
Gone to the stable, put the horse up.
She has gone down to open the door.

This night she is no better than her man
And does not mind that he is half drunk,
She is mad about him. They mount the stairs;
She brings him into her own chamber.
And that is the marriage chamber. Now
The window is dimly lit again.
Do not let him touch you! It is not true
That drunken men cannot beget,
And if he touch he must beget
And you must bear his murderer.
Deaf! Both deaf! If I should throw
A stick or a stone they would not hear;
And that's a proof my wits are out.
But there's a problem: she must live
Through everything in exact detail,
Driven to it by remorse, and yet
Can she renew the sexual act
And find no pleasure in it, and if not,
If pleasure and remorse must both be there
Which is the greater?
I lack schooling.
Go fetch Tertullian; he and I
Will ravel all that problem out
Whilst those two lie upon the mattress
Begetting me.
Come back! Come back!
And so you thought to slip away,
My bag of money between your fingers,

And that I could not talk and see!
You have been rummaging in the pack.
[The light in the window has faded out.

BOY. YOU never gave me my right share.

OLD MAN. And had I given it, young as you are
You would have spent it upon drink.

BOY. What if I did? I had a right
To get it and spend it as I chose.

OLD MAN. Give me that bag and no more words.

BOY. I will not.

OLD MAN. — I will break your fingers.
[They struggle for the bag. In the struggle it drops, scattering the money. The old man staggers but does not fall. They stand looking at each other.

BOY. What if I killed you? You killed my grand-dad.
Because you were young and he was old.
Now I am young and you are old.
[A *window is lit up. A man is seen pouring whiskey into a glass.*

OLD MAN *[staring at window].* Better looking, those sixteen years —

BOY. What are you muttering?

OLD MAN. — Younger — and yet
She should have known he was not her kind.

BOY. What are you saying? Out with it!
[Old Man points to window.
My God! The window is lit up
And somebody stands there, although
The floorboards are all burnt away.

OLD MAN. The window is lit up because my father
Has come to find a glass for his whiskey.
He leans there like some tired beast.

BOY. A dead, living, murdered man.

OLD MAN. "Then the bride sleep fell upon Adam:"
Where did I read those words?
And yet
There's nothing leaning in the window
But the impression upon my mother's mind,
Being dead she is alone in her remorse.

BOY. A body that was a bundle of old bones
Before I was born. Horrible! Horrible!
[He covers his eyes.

OLD MAN. That beast there would know nothing, being nothing,
If I should kill a man under the window;
He would not even turn his head.
[He stabs the Boy.
My father and my son on the same jack-knife!
That finishes — there — there — there —
[He stabs again and again. The window grows dark.

OLD MAN. “Hush-a-bye baby, thy father’s a knight,
Thy mother a lady, lovely and bright.”
No, that is something that I read in a book,
And if I sing it must be to my mother,
And I lack rhyme.
[The stage has grown dark except where the tree stands in white light.
Study that tree.
It stands there like a purified soul,
All cold, sweet, glistening light.
Dear mother, the window is dark again
But you are in the light because
I finished all that consequence.
I killed that lad because he had grown up.
He would have struck a woman’s fancy,
Begot, and passed pollution on.
I am a wretched foul old man
And therefore harmless. When I have stuck
This old jack-knife into a sod
And pulled it out all bright again,
And picked up all the money that he dropped,
I’ll to a distant place, and there
Tell my old jokes among new men.
[He cleans the knife and begins to pick up money.
Hoof beats! Dear God,
How quickly it returns — beat — beat —

Her mind cannot hold up that dream.
Twice a murderer and all for nothing,
And she must animate that dead night

Not once but many times!

O God!

Release my mother’s soul from its dream!

Mankind can do no more. Appease

The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

Curtain

The Death of Cuchulain

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Cuchulain —
An Old Man
Eithne Inguba —
A Blind Man
Aoife —
A Servant
Emer —
A Singer, a Piper, and a Drummer
The Morrigu, *Goddess of War*

THE DEATH OF CUCHULAIN

A bare stage of any period. A very old man looking like something out of mythology.

OLD MAN. I have been asked to produce a play called *The Death of Cuchulain.* It is the last of a series of plays which has for theme his life and death. I have been selected because I am out of fashion and out of date like the antiquated romantic stuff the thing is made of. I am so old that I have forgotten the name of my father and mother, unless indeed I am, as I affirm, the son of Talma, and he was so old that his friends and acquaintances still read Virgil and Homer. When they told me that I could have my own way I wrote certain guiding principles on a bit of newspaper. I wanted an audience of fifty or a hundred, and if there are more I beg them not to shuffle their feet or talk when the actors are speaking. I am sure that as I am producing a play for people I like it is not probable in this vile age that they will be more in number than those who listened to the first performance of Milton's *Comus.* On the present occasion they must know the old epics and Mr. Yeats' plays about them. Such people, however poor, have libraries of their own. If there are more than a hundred I won't be able to escape people who are educating themselves out of the book societies and the like, sciolists all, pickpockets and opinionated bitches. Why pickpockets? I will explain that, I will make it all quite clear.

[Drum and pipe behind the scene, then silence.

That's from the musicians; I asked them to do that if I was getting excited. If you were as old you would find it easy to get excited. Before the night ends you will meet the music. There is a singer, a piper and a drummer. I have picked them up here and there about the streets, and I will teach them,

if I live, the music of the beggarman, Homer's music. I promise a dance. I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil. Emer must dance, there must be severed heads — I am old, I belong to mythology — severed heads for her to dance before. I had thought to have had those heads carved, but no, if the dancer can dance properly no wood-carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood. But I was at my wit's end to find a good dancer; I could have got such a dancer once, but she has gone; the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death. I spit three times. I spit upon the dancers painted by
Degas. I spit upon their short bodices, their stiff stays, their toes whereon they spin like peg-tops, above all upon that chambermaid face. They might have looked timeless, Rameses the Great, but not the chambermaid, that old maid history. I spit! I spit! I spit!

[The stage is darkened, the curtain falls. Pipe and drum begin and continue until the curtain rises again on a bare stage. Half a minute later Eithne Inguba enters.

EITHNE. Cuchulain! Cuchulain!
Cuchulain enters from back
I am Emer's messenger,
I am your wife's messenger, she has bid me say
You must not linger here in sloth for Maeve
With all those Connacht ruffians at her back
Burns barns and houses up at Emain Macha:
Your house at Muirthemne already burns.
No matter what's the odds, no matter though

Your death may come of it, ride out and fight.
The scene is set and you must out and fight.

CUCHULAIN. YOU have told me nothing. I am already armed.
I have sent a messenger to gather men,
And wait for his return. What have you there?

EITHNE. I have nothing.

CUCHULAIN. — There is something in your hand.

EITHNE. NO.

CUCHULAIN. Have you not a letter in your hand?

EITHNE. I do not know how it got into my hand.
I am straight from Emer. We were in some place.
She spoke. She saw.

CUCHULAIN. — This letter is from Emer.
It tells a different story. I am not to move
Until to-morrow morning, for, if now,
I must face odds no man can face and live.
To-morrow morning Conall Cearnach comes
With a great host.

EITHNE. — I do not understand.
Who can have put that letter in my hand?

CUCHULAIN. And there is something more to make it certain
I shall not stir till morning; you are sent

To be my bedfellow, but have no fear;
All that is written but I much prefer
Your own unwritten words. I am for the fight,
I and my handful are set upon the fight;
We have faced great odds before, a straw decided.
The Morrigu enters and stands between them

EITHNE. I know that somebody or something is there,
Yet nobody that I can see.

CUCHULAIN. — There is nobody.

EITHNE. Who among the gods of the air and the upper air
Has a bird's head?

CUCHULAIN. — Morrigu is headed like a crow.

EITHNE *[dazed].* Morrigu, war goddess, stands between.
Her black wing touched me upon the shoulder, and now
All is intelligible.
[The Morrigu goes out.
Maeve put me into a trance.
Though when Cuchulain slept with her as a boy
She seemed as pretty as a bird, she has changed.
She has an eye in the middle of her forehead.

CUCHULAIN. A woman that has an eye in the middle of her forehead,
A woman that is headed like a crow,
But she that put those words into your mouth
Had nothing monstrous; you put them there yourself.

You need a younger man, a friendlier man,
But fearing what my violence might do
Thought out those words to send me to my death,
And were in such excitement you forgot
The letter in your hand.

EITHNE. — NOW that I wake
I say that Maeve did nothing out of error;
What mouth could you believe if not my mouth?

CUCHULAIN. When I went mad at my son's death and drew
My sword against the sea, it was my wife
That brought me back.

EITHNE. — Better women than I
Have served you well, but 'twas to me you turned.

CUCHULAIN. You thought that if you changed Ed kill you for it,
When everything sublunary must change,
And if I have not changed that goes to prove
That I am monstrous.

EITHNE. — You're not the man I loved,
That violent man forgave no treachery.
If thinking what you think you can forgive
It is because you are about to die.

CUCHULAIN. Spoken too loudly and too near the door;
Speak low if you would speak about my death,

Or not in that strange voice exulting in it.
Who knows what ears listen behind the door?

EITHNE. Some that would not forgive a traitor, some
That have the passion necessary to life,
Some not about to die. When you are gone
I shall denounce myself to all your cooks,
Scullions, armourers, bed-makers and messengers,
Until they hammer me with a ladle, cut me with a knife,
Impale me upon a spit, put me to death
By what foul way best please their fancy,
So that my shade can stand among the shades
And greet your shade and prove it is no traitor.

CUCHULAIN. Women have spoken so plotting a man's death.
Enter a Servant

SERVANT. Your great horse is bitted. All wait the word.

CUCHULAIN. I come to give it, but must ask a question.
This woman, wild with grief, declares that she
Out of pure treachery has told me lies
That should have brought my death. What can I do?
How can I save her from her own wild words?

SERVANT. Is her confession true?

CUCHULAIN. — I make the truth.
I say she brings a message from my wife.

SERVANT. What if I make her swallow poppy juice?

CUCHULAIN. What herbs seem suitable, but protect her life
As it were your own and should I not return
Give her to Conal Cearnach because the women
Have called him a good lover.

EITHNE. — I might have peace that know
The Morrigu, the woman like a crow,
Stands to my defence and cannot lie,
But that Cuchulain is about to die.

[Pipe and drum. The stage is dark for a moment. When it lights up again it is empty. Cuchulain enters wounded. He tries to fasten himself to a pillar-stone with his belt. Aoife, an erect white-haired woman, enters.

AOIFE. Am I recognised, Cuchulain?

CUCHULAIN. — YOU fought with a sword,
It seemed that we should kill each other; then
Your body wearied and I took your sword.

AOIFE. But look again, Cuchulain! Look again!

CUCHULAIN. Your hair is white.

AOIFE. — That time was long ago,
And now it is my time. I have come to kill you.

CUCHULAIN. Where am I? Why am I here?

AOIFE. — YOU asked their leave,
When certain that you had six mortal wounds,

To drink out of the pool.

CUCHULAIN. — I have put my belt
About this stone and want to fasten it
And die upon my feet, but am too wèak.
Fasten this belt.
[She helps him to do so.
And now I know your name,
Aoife, the mother of my son. We met
At the Hawk's Well under the withered trees.
I killed him upon Baile's Strand, that is why
Maeve parted ranks that she might let you through.
You have a right to kill me.

AOIFE. — Though I have
Her army did not part to let me through.
The grey of Macha, that great horse of yours
Killed in the battle, came out of the pool
As though it were alive, and went three times
In a great circle round you and that stone,
Then leaped into the pool and not a man
Of all that terrified army dare approach,
But I approach.

CUCHULAIN. — Because you have the right.

AOIFE. But I am an old woman now and that
Your strength may not start up when the time comes
I wind my veil about this ancient stone
And fasten down your hands.

CUCHULAIN. — But do not spoil your veil:
Your veils are beautiful, some with threads of gold.

AOIFE. I am too old to care for such things now.
[She has wound the veil about him.

CUCHULAIN. There was no reason so to spoil your veil:
I am weak from loss of blood.

AOIFE. — I was afraid,
But now that I have wound you in the veil
I am not afraid. Our son — how did he fight?

CUCHULAIN. Age makes more skilful but not better men.

AOIFE. I have been told you did not know his name,
And wanted, because he had a look of me,
To be his friend, but Conchubar forbade it.

CUCHULAIN. Forbade it and commanded me to fight;
That very day I had sworn to do his will,
Yet I refused him and spoke about a look;
But somebody spoke of witchcraft and I said
Witchcraft had made the look, and fought and killed him.
Then I went mad, I fought against the sea.

AOIFE. I seemed invulnerable; you took my sword;
You threw me on the ground and left me there.
I searched the mountain for your sleeping-place
And laid my virgin body at your side,
And yet, because you had left me, hated you

And thought that I would kill you in your sleep
And yet begot a son that night between
Two black thorn trees.

CUCHULAIN. — I cannot understand.

AOIFE. Because about to die.
Somebody comes.
Some countryman, and when he finds you there,
And none to protect him, will be terrified.
I will keep out of his sight for I have things
That I must ask questions on before I kill you.

[She goes. The Blind Man of "On Baile's Strand" comes in. He moves his stick about until he finds the standing stone; he lays his stick down, stoops and touches Cuchulain's feet. He feels the legs.

BLIND MAN. Ah! Ah!

CUCHULAIN. — I think you are a blind old man.

BLIND MAN. A blind old beggar-man. What is your name?

CUCHULAIN. Cuchulain.

BLIND MAN. — They say that you are weak with wounds.
I stood between a fool and the sea at Baile's Strand
When you went mad. What's bound about your hands
So that they cannot move? Some womanish stuff.
I have been fumbling with my stick since the dawn
And then heard many voices. I began to beg.

Somebody said that I was in Maeve's tent,
And somebody else, a big man by his voice,
That if I brought Cuchulain's head in a bag
I would be given twelve pennies; I had the bag
To carry what I get at kitchen doors,
Somebody told me how to find the place;
I thought it would have taken till the night
But this has been my lucky day.

CUCHULAIN. — Twelve pennies!

BLIND MAN. I would not promise anything until the woman,
The great Queen Maeve herself, repeated the words.

CUCHULAIN. Twelve pennies. What better reason for killing a man?
You have a knife, but have you sharpened it?

BLIND MAN. I keep it sharp because it cuts my food.

[He lays bag on ground and begins feeling Cuchulain's body, his hands mounting upward.

CUCHULAIN. I think that you know everything, Blind Man,
My mother or my nurse said that the blind
Know everything.

BLIND MAN. — NO, but they have good sense.
How could I have got twelve pennies for your head
If I had not good sense?

CUCHULAIN. — There floats out there
The shape that I shall take when I am dead,
My soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape,
And is not that a strange shape for the soul
Of a great fighting-man?

BLIND MAN. — Your shoulder is there,
This is your neck. Ah! Ah! Are you ready, Cuchulain?

CUCHULAIN. I say it is about to sing.
[The stage darkens.

BLIND MAN. — Ah! Ah!

[Music of pipe and drum, the curtain falls, the music ceases as the curtain rises upon a bare stage. There is nobody upon the stage except a woman with a crow's head. She is the Morrigu. She stands towards the back. She holds a black parallelogram the size of a man's head. There are six other parallelograms near the backcloth.

MORRIGU. The dead can hear me and to the dead I speak.
This head is great Cuchulain's, those other six
Gave him six mortal wounds. This man came first,
Youth lingered though the years ran on, that season
A woman loves the best, Maeve's latest lover;
This man had given him the second wound,
He had possessed her once; these were her sons,
Two valiant men that gave the third and fourth;
These other men were men of no account,
They saw that he was weakening and crept in,

One gave him the sixth wound and one the fifth.
Conall avenged him. I arranged the dance.
[Emer enters. The Morrigu places the head of Cuchulain upon the ground and goes out. Emer runs in and begins to dance. She so moves that she seems to rage against the heads of those that had wounded Cuchulain, perhaps makes movements as though to strike them, going three times round the circle of the heads. She then moves towards the head of Cuchulain, — It may, if need be, be raised above the others on a pedestal — she moves as if in adoration or in triumph. She is about to prostrate herself before it, perhaps does so, then rises, looking up as though listening. She seems to hesitate between the head and what she hears. Then she stands motionless. There is silence and in the silence a few faint bird notes. The stage darkens slowly. Then comes loud music, but now it is quite different. It is the music of some Irish fair of our day. The stage brightens. Emer and the head are gone. There is none there but the three Musicians. They are in ragged streetsingers' clothes; two of them play pipe and drum. They cease. The Street-Singer begins to sing.

SINGER. The harlot sang to the beggar-man.
I meet them face to face,
Conall, Cuchulain, Usna's boys,
All that most ancient race;
Maeve had three in an hour they say;
I adore those clever eyes,
Those muscular bodies, but can get
No grip upon their thighs.
I meet those long pale faces,
Hear their great horses, then
Recall what centuries have passed

Since they were living men,
That there are still some living
That do my limbs unclothe,
But that the flesh my flesh has gripped
I both adore and loathe.
[Pipe and drum music.

SINGER. Are those things that men adore and loathe
Their sole reality?
What stood in the Post Office
With Pearse and Connolly?
What comes out of the mountain
Where men first shed their blood?
Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed
He stood where they had stood?

No body like his body
Has modern woman borne,
But an old man looking back on life
Imagines it in scorn.
A statue's there to mark the place
By Oliver Sheppard done.
So ends the tale that the harlot
Sang to the beggar-man.
[Music from pipe and drum.

Curtain

The Autobiographies

Ben Bulben, Sligo, where Yeats requested to be buried. The poet was staying in France when he passed away and he was buried at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. After World War II, Yeats' remains were moved to Drumcliffe, County Sligo, by the foot of Ben Bulben.

Reveries Over Childhood and Youth

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PREFACE

Sometimes when I remember a relative that I have been fond of, or a strange incident of the past, I wander here and there till I have somebody to talk to. Presently I notice that my listener is bored; but now that I have written it out, I may even begin to forget it all. In any case, because one can always close a book, my friend need not be bored.

I have changed nothing to my knowledge, and yet it must be that I have changed many things without my knowledge, for I am writing after so many years, and have consulted neither friend nor letter nor old newspaper and describe what comes oftenest into my memory.

I say this fearing that some surviving friend of my youth may remember something in a different shape and be offended with my book.

Christmas Day, 1914.

I

My first memories are fragmentary and isolated and contemporaneous, as though one remembered vaguely some early day of the Seven Days. It seems as if time had not yet been created, for all are connected with emotion and place and without sequence.

I remember sitting upon somebody's knee, looking out of a window at a wall covered with cracked and falling plaster, but what wall I do not remember, and being told that some relation once lived there. I am looking out of another window in London. It is at Fitzroy Road. Some boys are playing in the road and among them a boy in uniform, a telegraph boy perhaps. When I ask who the boy is, a servant tells me that he is going to blow the town up, and I go to sleep in terror.

After that come memories of Sligo, where I live with my grandparents. I am sitting on the ground looking at a mastless toy boat, with the paint rubbed and scratched, and I say to myself in great melancholy, "it is further away than it used to be," and while I am saying it I am looking at a long scratch in the stern, for it is especially the scratch which is further away. Then one day at dinner my great-uncle William Middleton says, "we should not make light of the troubles of children. They are worse than ours, because we can see the end of our trouble and they can never see any end," and I feel grateful for I know that I am very unhappy and have often said to myself, "when you grow up, never talk as grown-up people do of the happiness of childhood." I may have already had the night of misery when, having prayed for several days that I might die, I had begun to be afraid that I was dying and prayed that I might live. There was no reason for my unhappiness. Nobody was unkind, and my grandmother has still after so many years my gratitude and my reverence. The house was so big that there

was always a room to hide in, and I had a red pony and a garden where I could wander, and there were two dogs to follow at my heels, one white with some black spots on his head and the other with long black hair all over him. I used to think about God and fancy that I was very wicked, and one day when I threw a stone and hit a duck in the yard by mischance and broke its wing, I was full of wonder when I was told that the duck would be cooked for dinner and that I should not be punished.

Some of my misery was loneliness and some of it fear of old William Pollexfen my grandfather. He was never unkind, and I cannot remember that he ever spoke harshly to me, but it was the custom to fear and admire him. He had won the freedom of some Spanish city for saving life, but was so silent that his wife never knew it till he was near eighty, and then from the chance visit of some old sailor. She asked him if it was true and he said it was true, but she knew him too well to question and his old shipmate had left the town. She too had the habit of fear. We knew that he had been in many parts of the world, for there was a great scar on his hand made by a whaling-hook, and in the dining-room was a cabinet with bits of coral in it and a jar of water from the Jordan for the baptising of his children and Chinese pictures upon rice-paper and an ivory walking-stick from India that came to me after his death. He had great physical strength and had the reputation of never ordering a man to do anything he would not do himself. He owned many sailing ships and once, when a captain just come to anchor at Rosses Point reported something wrong with the rudder, had sent a messenger to say “send a man down to find out what’s wrong.” “The crew all refuse” was the answer. “Go down yourself” was my grandfather’s order, and when that was not obeyed, he dived from the main deck, all the neighbourhood lined along the pebbles of the shore. He came up with his skin torn but well informed about the rudder. He had a violent temper and

kept a hatchet at his bedside for burglars and would knock a man down instead of going to law, and I once saw him hunt a group of men with a horsewhip. He had no relation for he was an only child, and being solitary and silent, he had few friends. He corresponded with Campbell of Islay who had befriended him and his crew after a shipwreck, and Captain Webb, the first man who had swum the Channel and who was drowned swimming the Niagara Rapids, had been a mate in his employ and became a close friend. That is all the friends I can remember and yet he was so looked up to and admired that when he returned from taking the waters at Bath his men would light bonfires along the railway line for miles, while his partner William Middleton whose father after the great famine had attended the sick for weeks, and taken cholera from a man he carried in his arms into his own house and died of it, and was himself civil to everybody and a cleverer man than my grandfather, came and went without notice. I think I confused my grandfather with God, for I remember in one of my attacks of melancholy praying that he might punish me for my sins, and I was shocked and astonished when a daring little girl — a cousin I think — having waited under a group of trees in the avenue, where she knew he would pass near four o'clock on the way to his dinner, said to him, "if I were you and you were a little girl, I would give you a doll."

Yet for all my admiration and alarm, neither I nor anyone else thought it wrong to outwit his violence or his rigour; and his lack of suspicion and a certain helplessness made that easy while it stirred our affection. When I must have been still a very little boy, seven or eight years old perhaps, an uncle called me out of bed one night, to ride the five or six miles to Rosses Point to borrow a railway-pass from a cousin. My grandfather had one, but thought it dishonest to let another use it, but the cousin was not so particular. I was let out through a gate that opened upon a little lane beside

the garden away from ear-shot of the house, and rode delighted through the moonlight, and awoke my cousin in the small hours by tapping on his window with a whip. I was home again by two or three in the morning and found the coachman waiting in the little lane. My grandfather would not have thought such an adventure possible, for every night at eight he believed that the stable-yard was locked, and he knew that he was brought the key. Some servant had once got into trouble at night and so he had arranged that they should all be locked in. He never knew, what everybody else in the house knew, that for all the ceremonious bringing of the key the gate was never locked.

Even to-day when I read "King Lear" his image is always before me and I often wonder if the delight in passionate men in my plays and in my poetry is more than his memory. He must have been ignorant, though I could not judge him in my childhood, for he had run away to sea when a boy, "gone to sea through the hawse-hole" as he phrased it, and I can but remember him with two books — his Bible and Falconer's "Shipwreck," a little green-covered book that lay always upon his table; he belonged to some younger branch of an old Cornish family. His father had been in the Army, had retired to become an owner of sailing ships, and an engraving of some old family place my grandfather thought should have been his hung next a painted coat of arms in the little back parlour. His mother had been a Wexford woman, and there was a tradition that his family had been linked with Ireland for generations and once had their share in the old Spanish trade with Galway. He had a good deal of pride and disliked his neighbours, whereas his wife, a Middleton, was gentle and patient and did many charities in the little back parlour among frieze coats and shawled heads, and every night when she saw him asleep went the round of the house alone with a candle to make certain there was no burglar in danger of the hatchet.

She was a true lover of her garden and before the care of her house had grown upon her, would choose some favourite among her flowers and copy it upon rice-paper. I saw some of her handiwork the other day and I wondered at the delicacy of form and colour and at a handling that may have needed a magnifying glass it was so minute. I can remember no other pictures but the Chinese paintings, and some coloured prints of battles in the Crimea upon the wall of a passage, and the painting of a ship at the passage end darkened by time.

My grown-up uncles and aunts, my grandfather's many sons and daughters, came and went, and almost all they said or did has faded from my memory, except a few harsh words that convince me by a vividness out of proportion to their harshness that all were habitually kind and considerate. The youngest of my uncles was stout and humorous and had a tongue of leather over the keyhole of his door to keep the draught out, and another whose bedroom was at the end of a long stone passage had a model turret ship in a glass case. He was a clever man and had designed the Sligo quays, but was now going mad and inventing a vessel of war that could not be sunk, his pamphlet explained, because of a hull of solid wood. Only six months ago my sister awoke dreaming that she held a wingless sea-bird in her arms and presently she heard that he had died in his mad-house, for a sea-bird is the omen that announces the death or danger of a Pollexfen. An uncle, George Pollexfen, afterwards astrologer and mystic, and my dear friend, came but seldom from Ballina, once to a race meeting with two postillions dressed in green; and there was that younger uncle who had sent me for the railway-pass. He was my grandmother's favourite, and had, the servants told me, been sent away from school for taking a crowbar to a bully.

I can only remember my grandmother punishing me once. I was playing in the kitchen and a servant in horseplay pulled my shirt out of my trousers in front just as my grandmother came in and I, accused of I knew not what childish indecency, was given my dinner in a room by myself. But I was always afraid of my uncles and aunts, and once the uncle who had taken the crowbar to the bully found me eating lunch which my grandmother had given me and reproved me for it and made me ashamed. We breakfasted at nine and dined at four and it was considered self-indulgent to eat anything between meals; and once an aunt told me that I had reined in my pony and struck it at the same moment that I might show it off as I rode through the town, and I, because I had been accused of what I thought a very dark crime, had a night of misery. Indeed I remember little of childhood but its pain. I have grown happier with every year of life as though gradually conquering something in myself, for certainly my miseries were not made by others but were a part of my own mind.

II

One day someone spoke to me of the voice of the conscience, and as I brooded over the phrase I came to think that my soul, because I did not hear an articulate voice, was lost. I had some wretched days until being alone with one of my aunts I heard a whisper in my ear, “what a tease you are!” At first I thought my aunt must have spoken, but when I found she had not, I concluded it was the voice of my conscience and was happy again. From that day the voice has come to me at moments of crisis, but now it is a voice in my head that is sudden and startling. It does not tell me what to do, but often reproves me. It will say perhaps, “that is unjust” of some thought; and once when I complained that a prayer had not been heard, it said, “you have been helped.” I had a little flagstaff in front of the house and a red flag with the Union Jack in the corner. Every night I pulled my flag down and folded it up and laid it on a shelf in my bedroom, and one morning before breakfast I found it, though I knew I had folded it up the night before, knotted round the bottom of the flagstaff so that it was touching the grass. I must have heard the servants talking of the faeries for I concluded at once that a faery had tied those four knots and from that on believed that one had whispered in my ear. I have been told, though I do not remember it myself, that I saw, whether once or many times I do not know, a supernatural bird in the corner of the room. Once too I was driving with my grandmother a little after dark close to the Channel that runs for some five miles from Sligo to the sea, and my grandmother showed me the red light of an outward-bound steamer and told me that my grandfather was on board, and that night in my sleep I screamed out and described the steamer’s wreck. The next morning my grandfather arrived on a blind horse found for him by grateful passengers. He had, as I remember the story, been asleep when the captain aroused him to say they were going on the rocks. He said, “have you tried

sail on her?" and judging from some answer that the captain was demoralised took over the command and, when the ship could not be saved, got the crew and passengers into the boats. His own boat was upset and he saved himself and some others by swimming; some women had drifted ashore, buoyed up by their crinolines. "I was not so much afraid of the sea as of that terrible man with his oar," was the comment of a schoolmaster who was among the survivors. Eight men were, however, drowned and my grandfather suffered from that memory at intervals all his life, and if asked to read family prayers never read anything but the shipwreck of St. Paul.

I remember the dogs more clearly than anyone except my grandfather and grandmother. The black hairy one had no tail because it had been sliced off, if I was told the truth, by a railway train. I think I followed at their heels more than they did at mine, and that their journeys ended at a rabbit-warren behind the garden; and sometimes they had savage fights, the black hairy dog, being well protected by its hair, suffering least. I can remember one so savage that the white dog would not take his teeth out of the black dog's hair till the coachman hung them over the side of a water-butt, one outside and one in the water. My grandmother once told the coachman to cut the hair like a lion's hair and, after a long consultation with the stable-boy, he cut it all over the head and shoulders and left it on the lower part of the body. The dog disappeared for a few days and I did not doubt that its heart was broken. There was a large garden behind the house full of apple-trees with flower-beds and grass-plots in the centre and two figure-heads of ships, one among the strawberry plants under a wall covered with fruit trees and one among the flowers. The one among the flowers was a white lady in flowing robes, while the other, a stalwart man in uniform, had been taken from a three-masted ship of my grandfather's called "The Russia," and there was a belief among the servants that the stalwart man represented the

Tsar and had been presented by the Tsar himself. The avenue, or as they say in England the drive, that went from the hall door through a clump of big trees to an insignificant gate and a road bordered by broken and dirty cottages, was but two or three hundred yards, and I often thought it should have been made to wind more, for I judged people's social importance mainly by the length of their avenues. This idea may have come from the stable-boy, for he was my principal friend. He had a book of Orange rhymes, and the days when we read them together in the hay-loft gave me the pleasure of rhyme for the first time. Later on I can remember being told, when there was a rumour of a Fenian rising, that rifles had been served out to the Orangemen and presently, when I had begun to dream of my future life, I thought I would like to die fighting the Fenians. I was to build a very fast and beautiful ship and to have under my command a company of young men who were always to be in training like athletes and so become as brave and handsome as the young men in the story-books, and there was to be a big battle on the sea-shore near Rosses and I was to be killed. I collected little pieces of wood and piled them up in a corner of the yard, and there was an old rotten log in a distant field I often went to look at because I thought it would go a long way in the making of the ship. All my dreams were of ships; and one day a sea captain who had come to dine with my grandfather put a hand on each side of my head and lifted me up to show me Africa, and another day a sea captain pointed to the smoke from the Pern mill on the quays rising up beyond the trees of the lawn, as though it came from the mountain, and asked me if Ben Bulben was a burning mountain.

Once every few months I used to go to Rosses Point or Ballisodare to see another little boy, who had a piebald pony that had once been in a circus and sometimes forgot where it was and went round and round. He was

George Middleton, son of my great-uncle William Middleton. Old Middleton had bought land, then believed a safe investment, at Ballisodare and at Rosses, and spent the winter at Ballisodare and the summer at Rosses. The Middleton and Pollexfen flour mills were at Ballisodare, and a great salmon weir, rapids and a waterfall, but it was more often at Rosses that I saw my cousin. We rowed in the river mouth or were taken sailing in a heavy slow schooner yacht or in a big ship's boat that had been rigged and decked. There were great cellars under the house, for it had been a smuggler's house a hundred years before, and sometimes three loud raps would come upon the drawing room window at sun-down, setting all the dogs barking, some dead smuggler giving his accustomed signal. One night I heard them very distinctly and my cousins often heard them, and later on my sister. A pilot had told me that, after dreaming three times of a treasure buried in my uncle's garden, he had climbed the wall in the middle of the night and begun to dig but grew disheartened "because there was so much earth." I told somebody what he had said and was told that it was well he did not find it for it was guarded by a spirit that looked like a flat iron. At Ballisodare there was a cleft among the rocks that I passed with terror because I believed that a murderous monster lived there that made a buzzing sound like a bee.

It was through the Middletons perhaps that I got my interest in country stories and certainly the first faery stories that I heard were in the cottages about their houses. The Middletons took the nearest for friends and were always in and out of the cottages of pilots and of tenants. They were practical, always doing something with their hands, making boats, feeding chickens, and without ambition. One of them had designed a steamer many years before my birth and long after I had grown to manhood one could hear it — it had some sort of obsolete engine — many miles off

wheezing in the Channel like an asthmatic person. It had been built on the lake and dragged through the town by many horses, stopping before the windows where my mother was learning her lessons, and plunging the whole school into candle-light for five days, and was still patched and repatched mainly because it was believed to be a bringer of good luck. It had been called after the betrothed of its builder "Janet," long corrupted into the more familiar "Jennet," and the betrothed died in my youth having passed her eightieth year and been her husband's plague because of the violence of her temper. Another who was but a year or two older than myself used to shock me by running after hens to know by their feel if they were on the point of dropping an egg. They let their houses decay and the glass fall from the windows of their greenhouses, but one among them at any rate had the second sight. They were liked but had not the pride and reserve, the sense of decorum and order, the instinctive playing before themselves that belongs to those who strike the popular imagination.

Sometimes my grandmother would bring me to see some old Sligo gentlewoman whose garden ran down to the river, ending there in a low wall full of wallflowers, and I would sit up upon my chair, very bored, while my elders ate their seed-cake and drank their sherry. My walks with the servants were more interesting; sometimes we would pass a little fat girl and a servant persuaded me to write her a love-letter, and the next time she passed she put her tongue out. But it was the servant's stories that interested me. At such and such a corner a man had got a shilling from a drill sergeant by standing in a barrel and had then rolled out of it and shown his crippled legs. And in such and such a house an old woman had hid herself under the bed of her guests, an officer and his wife, and on hearing them abuse her, beaten them with a broomstick. All the well-known families had their grotesque or tragic or romantic legends, and I often said to myself how

terrible it would be to go away and die where nobody would know my story. Years afterwards, when I was ten or twelve years old and in London, I would remember Sligo with tears, and when I began to write, it was there I hoped to find my audience. Next to Merville where I lived, was another tree-surrounded house where I sometimes went to see a little boy who stayed there occasionally with his grandmother, whose name I forget and who seemed to me kind and friendly, though when I went to see her in my thirteenth or fourteenth year I discovered that she only cared for very little boys. When the visitors called I hid in the hay-loft and lay hidden behind the great heap of hay while a servant was calling my name in the yard.

I do not know how old I was (for all these events seem at the same distance) when I was made drunk. I had been out yachting with an uncle and my cousins and it had come on very rough. I had lain on deck between the mast and the bowsprit and a wave had burst over me and I had seen green water over my head. I was very proud and very wet. When we got into Rosses again, I was dressed up in an older boy's clothes so that the trousers came down below my boots and a pilot gave me a little raw whiskey. I drove home with the uncle on an outside car and was so pleased with the strange state in which I found myself that for all my uncle could do, I cried to every passer-by that I was drunk, and went on crying it through the town and everywhere until I was put to bed by my grandmother and given something to drink that tasted of black currants and so fell asleep.

III

Some six miles off towards Ben Bulben and beyond the Channel, as we call the tidal river between Sligo and the Rosses, and on top of a hill there was a little square two-storeyed house covered with creepers and looking out upon a garden where the box borders were larger than any I had ever seen, and where I saw for the first time the crimson streak of the gladiolus and awaited its blossom with excitement. Under one gable a dark thicket of small trees made a shut-in mysterious place, where one played and believed that something was going to happen. My great-aunt Micky lived there. Micky was not her right name for she was Mary Yeats and her father had been my great-grandfather, John Yeats, who had been Rector of Drumcliffe, a few miles further off, and died in 1847. She was a spare, high-coloured, elderly woman and had the oldest looking cat I had ever seen, for its hair had grown into matted locks of yellowy white. She farmed and had one old man-servant, but could not have farmed at all, had not neighbouring farmers helped to gather in the crops, in return for the loan of her farm implements and "out of respect for the family," for as Johnny MacGurk, the Sligo barber said to me, "the Yeats's were always very respectable." She was full of family history; all her dinner knives were pointed like daggers through much cleaning, and there was a little James the First cream-jug with the Yeats motto and crest, and on her dining-room mantle-piece a beautiful silver cup that had belonged to my great-great-grandfather, who had married a certain Mary Butler. It had upon it the Butler crest and had been already old at the date 1534, when the initials of some bride and bridegroom were engraved under the lip. All its history for generations was rolled up inside it upon a piece of paper yellow with age, until some caller took the paper to light his pipe. Another family of Yeats, a widow and her two children on whom I called sometimes with my grandmother, lived near

in a long low cottage, and owned a very fierce turkeycock that did battle with their visitors; and some miles away lived the secretary to the Grand Jury and Land Agent, my great-uncle Mat Yeats and his big family of boys and girls; but I think it was only in later years that I came to know them well. I do not think any of these liked the Pollexfens, who were well off and seemed to them purse-proud, whereas they themselves had come down in the world. I remember them as very well-bred and very religious in the Evangelical way and thinking a good deal of Aunt Micky's old histories. There had been among our ancestors a Kings County soldier, one of Marlborough's generals, and when his nephew came to dine he gave him boiled pork, and when the nephew said he disliked boiled pork he had asked him to dine again and promised him something he would like better. However, he gave him boiled pork again and the nephew took the hint in silence. The other day as I was coming home from America, I met one of his descendants whose family has not another discoverable link with ours, and he too knew the boiled pork story and nothing else. We have the General's portrait, and he looks very fine in his armour and his long curly wig, and underneath it, after his name, are many honours that have left no tradition among us. Were we country people, we could have summarised his life in a legend.

Another ancestor or great-uncle had chased the United Irishmen for a fortnight, fallen into their hands and been hanged, and the notorious Major Sirr who betrayed the brothers Shears, taking their children upon his knees to question them, if the tale does not lie, had been god-father to several of my great-great-grandfather's children; while to make a balance, my great-grandfather had been Robert Emmett's friend and been suspected and imprisoned though but for a few hours. A great-uncle had been Governor of Penang, and led the forlorn hope at the taking of Rangoon, and an uncle of a

still older generation had fallen at New Orleans in 1813, and even in the last generation there had been lives of some power and pleasure. An old man who had entertained many famous people, in his 18th century house, where battlement and tower showed the influence of Horace Walpole, had but lately, after losing all his money, drowned himself, first taking off his rings and chain and watch as became a collector of many beautiful things; and once to remind us of more passionate life, a gun-boat put into Rosses, commanded by the illegitimate son of some great-uncle or other. Now that I can look at their miniatures, turning them over to find the name of soldier, or lawyer, or Castle official, and wondering if they cared for good books or good music, I am delighted with all that joins my life to those who had power in Ireland or with those anywhere that were good servants and poor bargainers, but I cared nothing as a child for Micky's tales. I could see my grandfather's ships come up the bay or the river, and his sailors treated me with deference, and a ship's carpenter made and mended my toy boats and I thought that nobody could be so important as my grandfather. Perhaps, too, it is only now that I can value those more gentle natures so unlike his passion and violence. An old Sligo priest has told me how my great-grandfather John Yeats always went into his kitchen rattling the keys, so much did he fear finding some one doing wrong, and how when the agent of the great landowner of his parish brought him from cottage to cottage to bid the women send their children to the Protestant school and all had promised till they came to one who cried, "child of mine will never darken your door," he had said "thank you, my woman, you are the first honest woman I have met to-day." My uncle, Mat Yeats, the Land Agent, had once waited up every night for a week to catch some boys who stole his apples and when he caught them had given them sixpence and told them not to do it again. Perhaps it is only fancy or the softening touch of the miniaturist

that makes me discover in their faces some courtesy and much gentleness. Two 18th century faces interest me the most, one that of a great-great-grandfather, for both have under their powdered curling wigs a half-feminine charm, and as I look at them I discover a something clumsy and heavy in myself. Yet it was a Yeats who spoke the only eulogy that turns my head. “We have ideas and no passions, but by marriage with a Pollexfen we have given a tongue to the sea cliffs.”

Among the miniatures there is a larger picture, an admirable drawing by I know not what master, that is too harsh and merry for its company. He was a connection and close friend of my great-grandmother Corbet, and though we spoke of him as “Uncle Beattie” in our childhood, no blood relation. My great-grandmother who died at ninety-three had many memories of him. He was the friend of Goldsmith & was accustomed to boast, clergyman though he was, that he belonged to a hunt-club of which every member but himself had been hanged or transported for treason, and that it was not possible to ask him a question he could not reply to with a perfectly appropriate blasphemy or indecency.

IV

Because I had found it hard to attend to anything less interesting than my thoughts, I was difficult to teach. Several of my uncles and aunts had tried to teach me to read, and because they could not, and because I was much older than children who read easily, had come to think, as I have learnt since, that I had not all my faculties. But for an accident they might have thought it for a long time. My father was staying in the house and never went to church, and that gave me the courage to refuse to set out one Sunday morning. I was often devout, my eyes filling with tears at the thought of God and of my own sins, but I hated church. My grandmother tried to teach me to put my toes first to the ground because I suppose I stumped on my heels and that took my pleasure out of the way there. Later on when I had learnt to read I took pleasure in the words of the hymn, but never understood why the choir took three times as long as I did in getting to the end; and the part of the service I liked, the sermon and passages of the Apocalypse and Ecclesiastes, were no compensation for all the repetitions and for the fatigue of so much standing. My father said if I would not go to church he would teach me to read. I think now that he wanted to make me go for my grandmother's sake and could think of no other way. He was an angry and impatient teacher and flung the reading book at my head, and next Sunday I decided to go to church. My father had, however, got interested in teaching me, and only shifted the lesson to a week-day till he had conquered my wandering mind. My first clear image of him was fixed on my imagination, I believe, but a few days before the first lesson. He had just arrived from London and was walking up and down the nursery floor. He had a very black beard and hair, and one cheek bulged out with a fig that was there to draw the pain out of a bad tooth. One of the nurses (a nurse had come from London with my brothers and sisters) said to

the other that a live frog, she had heard, was best of all. Then I was sent to a dame school kept by an old woman who stood us in rows and had a long stick like a billiard cue to get at the back rows. My father was still at Sligo when I came back from my first lesson and asked me what I had been taught. I said I had been taught to sing, and he said, "sing then" and I sang

"Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean,
And the pleasant land"

high up in my head. So my father wrote to the old woman that I was never to be taught to sing again, and afterwards other teachers were told the same thing. Presently my eldest sister came on a long visit and she and I went to a little two-storeyed house in a poor street where an old gentlewoman taught us spelling and grammar. When we had learned our lesson well, we were allowed to look at a sword presented to her father who had led troops in India or China and to spell out a long complimentary inscription on the silver scabbard. As we walked to her house or home again we held a large umbrella before us, both gripping the handle and guiding ourselves by looking out of a round hole gnawed in the cover by a mouse. When I had got beyond books of one syllable, I began to spend my time in a room called the Library, though there were no books in it that I can remember except some old novels I never opened and a many volumed encyclopaedia published towards the end of the 18th century. I read this encyclopaedia a great deal and can remember a long passage considering whether fossil wood despite its appearance might not be only a curiously shaped stone.

My father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidences of religion and I weighed the matter perpetually with great anxiety, for I did not think I could live without religion. All my religious emotions were, I think, connected with clouds and cloudy glimpses of luminous sky, perhaps because of some bible picture of God's speaking to Abraham or the like. At least I can remember the sight moving me to tears. One day I got a decisive argument for belief. A cow was about to calve, and I went to the field where the cow was with some farm-hands who carried a lantern, and next day I heard that the cow had calved in the early morning. I asked everybody how calves were born, and because nobody would tell me, made up my mind that nobody knew. They were the gift of God, that much was certain, but it was plain that nobody had ever dared to see them come, and children must come in the same way. I made up my mind that when I was a man I would wait up till calf or child had come. I was certain there would be a cloud and a burst of light and God would bring the calf in the cloud out of the light. That thought made me content until a boy of twelve or thirteen, who had come on a visit for the day, sat beside me in a hay-loft and explained all the mechanism of sex. He had learnt all about it from an elder boy whose pathic he was (to use a term he would not have understood) and his description, given, as I can see now, as if he were telling of any other fact of physical life, made me miserable for weeks. After the first impression wore off, I began to doubt if he had spoken truth, but one day I discovered a passage in the encyclopaedia, though I only partly understood its long words, that confirmed what he had said. I did not know enough to be shocked at his relation to the elder boy, but it was the first breaking of the dream of childhood.

My realization of death came when my father and mother and my two brothers and my two sisters were on a visit. I was in the Library when I

heard feet running past and heard somebody say in the passage that my younger brother, Robert, had died. He had been ill for some days. A little later my sister and I sat at the table, very happy, drawing ships with their flags half-mast high. We must have heard or seen that the ships in the harbour had their flags at half-mast. Next day at breakfast I heard people telling how my mother and the servant had heard the banshee crying the night before he died. It must have been after this that I told my grandmother I did not want to go with her when she went to see old bed-ridden people because they would soon die.

V

At length when I was eight or nine an aunt said to me, “you are going to London. Here you are somebody. There you will be nobody at all.” I knew at the time that her words were a blow at my father, not at me, but it was some years before I knew her reason. She thought so able a man as my father could have found out some way of painting more popular pictures if he had set his mind to it and that it was wrong of him “to spend every evening at his club.” She had mistaken, for what she would have considered a place of wantonness, Heatherley’s Art School.

My mother and brother and sister were at Sligo perhaps when I was sent to England, for my father and I and a group of landscape painters lodged at Burnham Beeches with an old Mr. and Mrs. Earle. My father was painting the first big pond you come to if you have driven from Slough through Farnham Royal. He began it in spring and painted all through the year, the picture changing with the seasons, and gave it up unfinished when he had painted the snow upon the heath-covered banks. He is never satisfied and can never make himself say that any picture is finished. In the evening he heard me my lessons or read me some novel of Fenimore Cooper’s. I found delightful adventures in the woods — one day a blind worm and an adder fighting in a green hollow, and sometimes Mrs. Earle would be afraid to tidy the room because I had put a bottle full of newts on the mantle-piece. Now and then a boy from a farm on the other side of the road threw a pebble at my window at daybreak, and he and I went fishing in the big second pond. Now and then another farmer’s boy and I shot sparrows with an old pepper box revolver and the boy would roast them on a string. There was an old horse one of the painters called the scaffolding, and sometimes a son of old Earle’s drove with me to Slough and once to Windsor, and at Windsor we made our lunch of cold sausages bought from a public house. I

did not know what it was to be alone, for I could wander in pleasant alarm through the enclosed parts, then very large, or round some pond imagining ships going in and out among the reeds and thinking of Sligo or of strange seafaring adventures in the fine ship I should launch when I grew up. I had always a lesson to learn before night and that was a continual misery, for I could very rarely, with so much to remember, set my thoughts upon it and then only in fear. One day my father told me that a painter had said I was very thick-skinned and did not mind what was said to me, and I could not understand how anybody could be so unjust. It made me wretched to be idle but one could not help it. I was once surprised and shocked. All but my father and myself had been to London, and Kennedy and Farrar and Page, I remember the names vaguely, arrived laughing and talking. One of them had carried off a card of texts from the waiting room of the station and hung it up on the wall. I thought "he has stolen it," but my father and all made it a theme of merry conversation.

Then I returned to Sligo for a few weeks as I was to do once or twice in every year for years, and after that we settled in London. Perhaps my mother and the other children had been there all the time, for I remember my father now and again going to London. The first house we lived in was close to Burne Jones's house at North End, but we moved after a year or two to Bedford Park. At North End we had a pear tree in the garden and plenty of pears, but the pears used to be full of maggots, and almost opposite lived a school-master called O'Neill, and when a little boy told me that the school-master's great-grandfather had been a king I did not doubt it. I was sitting against the hedge and iron railing of some villa-garden there, when I heard one boy say to another it was something wrong with my liver that gave me such a dark complexion and that I could not live more than a year. I said to myself a year is a very long time, one can do such a lot of

things in a year, and put it out of my head. When my father gave me a holiday and later when I had a holiday from school I took my schooner boat to the round pond, sailing it very commonly against the two cutter yachts of an old naval officer. He would sometimes look at the ducks and say, “I would like to take that fellow home for my dinner,” and he sang me a sailor’s song about a coffin ship which left Sligo after the great famine, that made me feel very important. The servants at Sligo had told me the story. When she was moved from the berth she had lain in, an unknown dead man’s body had floated up, a very evil omen; and my grandfather, who was Lloyds’ agent, had condemned her, but she slipped out in the night. The pond had its own legends; and a boy who had seen a certain model steamer “burned to the water’s edge” was greatly valued as a friend. There was a little boy I was kind to because I knew his father had done something disgraceful, though I did not know what. It was years before I discovered that his father was but the maker of certain popular statues, many of which are now in public places. I had heard my father’s friends speak of him. Sometimes my sister came with me, and we would look into all the sweet shops & toy shops on our way home, especially into one opposite Holland House because there was a cutter yacht made of sugar in the window, and we drank at all the fountains. Once a stranger spoke to us and bought us sweets and came with us almost to our door. We asked him to come in and told him our father’s name. He would not come in, but laughed and said, “Oh, that is the painter who scrapes out every day what he painted the day before.” A poignant memory came upon me the other day while I was passing the drinking-fountain near Holland Park, for there I and my sister had spoken together of our longing for Sligo and our hatred of London. I know we were both very close to tears and remember with wonder, for I had never known anyone that cared for such momentoes, that I longed for a sod

of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand. It was some old race instinct like that of a savage, for we had been brought up to laugh at all display of emotion. Yet it was our mother, who would have thought its display a vulgarity, who kept alive that love. She would spend hours listening to stories or telling stories of the pilots and fishing people of Rosses Point, or of her own Sligo girlhood, and it was always assumed between her and us that Sligo was more beautiful than other places. I can see now that she had great depth of feeling, that she was her father's daughter. My memory of what she was like in those days has grown very dim, but I think her sense of personality, her desire of any life of her own, had disappeared in her care for us and in much anxiety about money. I always see her sewing or knitting in spectacles and wearing some plain dress. Yet ten years ago when I was in San Francisco, an old cripple came to see me who had left Sligo before her marriage; he came to tell me, he said, that my mother "had been the most beautiful girl in Sligo."

Mrs. Yeats, from a drawing by J. B. Yeats made in 1867

The only lessons I had ever learned were those my father taught me, for he terrified me by descriptions of my moral degradation and he humiliated me by my likeness to disagreeable people; but presently I was sent to school at Hammersmith. It was a Gothic building of yellow brick: a large hall full of desks, some small class-rooms and a separate house for boarders, all built perhaps in 1840 or 1850. I thought it an ancient building and that it had belonged to the founder of the school, Lord Godolphin, who was romantic to me because there was a novel about him. I never read the novel, but I thought only romantic people were put in books. On one side, there

was a piano factory of yellow brick, upon two sides half finished rows of little shops and villas all yellow brick, and on the fourth side, outside the wall of our playing field, a brickfield of cinders and piles of half-burned yellow bricks. All the names and faces of my school-fellows have faded from me except one name without a face and the face and name of one friend, mainly no doubt because it was all so long ago, but partly because I only seem to remember things that have mixed themselves up with scenes that have some quality to bring them again and again before the memory. For some days, as I walked homeward along the Hammersmith Road, I told myself that whatever I most cared for had been taken away. I had found a small, green-covered book given to my father by a Dublin man of science; it gave an account of the strange sea creatures the man of science had discovered among the rocks at Howth or dredged out of Dublin Bay. It had long been my favourite book; and when I read it I believed that I was growing very wise, but now I should have no time for it nor for my own thoughts. Every moment would be taken up learning or saying lessons or walking between school and home four times a day, for I came home in the middle of the day for dinner. But presently I forgot my trouble, absorbed in two things I had never known, companionship and enmity. After my first day's lesson, a circle of boys had got around me in a playing field and asked me questions, "who's your father?" "what does he do?" "how much money has he?" Presently a boy said something insulting. I had never struck anybody or been struck, and now all in a minute, without any intention upon my side, but as if I had been a doll moved by a string, I was hitting at the boys within reach and being hit. After that I was called names for being Irish, and had many fights and never, for years, got the better of any one of them; for I was delicate and had no muscles. Sometimes, however, I found means of retaliation, even of aggression. There was a boy with a big stride,

much feared by little boys, and finding him alone in the playing field, I went up to him and said, “rise upon Sugaun and sink upon Gad.” “What does that mean?” he said. “Rise upon hay-leg and sink upon straw,” I answered and told him that in Ireland the sergeant tied straw and hay to the ankles of a stupid recruit to show him the difference between his legs. My ears were boxed, and when I complained to my friends, they said I had brought it upon myself; and that I deserved all I got. I probably dared myself to other feats of a like sort, for I did not think English people intelligent or well-behaved unless they were artists. Everyone I knew well in Sligo despised Nationalists and Catholics, but all disliked England with a prejudice that had come down perhaps from the days of the Irish Parliament. I knew stories to the discredit of England, and took them all seriously. My mother had met some English woman who did not like Dublin because the legs of the men were too straight, and at Sligo, as everybody knew, an Englishman had once said to a car-driver, “if you people were not so lazy, you would pull down the mountain and spread it out over the sand and that would give you acres of good fields.” At Sligo there is a wide river mouth and at ebb tide most of it is dry sand, but all Sligo knew that in some way I cannot remember it was the spreading of the tide over the sand that left the narrow channel fit for shipping. At any rate the carman had gone chuckling all over Sligo with his tale. People would tell it to prove that Englishmen were always grumbling. “They grumble about their dinners and everything — there was an Englishman who wanted to pull down Knock-na-Rea” and so on. My mother had shown them to me kissing at railway stations, and taught me to feel disgust at their lack of reserve, and my father told how my grandfather, William Yeats, who had died before I was born, when he came home to his Rectory in County Down from an English visit, spoke of some man he had met on a coach

road who “Englishman-like” told him all his affairs. My father explained that an Englishman generally believed that his private affairs did him credit, while an Irishman, being poor and probably in debt, had no such confidence. I, however, did not believe in this explanation. My Sligo nurses, who had in all likelihood the Irish Catholic political hatred, had never spoken well of any Englishman.

Once when walking in the town of Sligo I had turned to look after an English man and woman whose clothes attracted me. The man I remember had gray clothes and knee-breeches and the woman a gray dress, and my nurse had said contemptuously, “towrows.” Perhaps before my time, there had been some English song with the burden “tow row row,” and everybody had told me that English people ate skates and even dog-fish, and I myself had only just arrived in England when I saw an old man put marmalade in his porridge. I was divided from all those boys, not merely by the anecdotes that are everywhere perhaps a chief expression of the distrust of races, but because our mental images were different. I read their boys’ books and they excited me, but if I read of some English victory, I did not believe that I read of my own people. They thought of Cressy and Agincourt and the Union Jack and were all very patriotic, and I, without those memories of Limerick and the Yellow Ford that would have strengthened an Irish Catholic, thought of mountain and lake, of my grandfather and of ships. Anti-Irish feeling was running high, for the Land League had been founded and landlords had been shot, and I, who had no politics, was yet full of pride, for it is romantic to live in a dangerous country.

I daresay I thought the rough manners of a cheap school, as my grandfather Yeats had those of a chance companion, typical of all England. At any rate I had a harassed life & got many a black eye and had many outbursts of grief and rage. Once a boy, the son of a great Bohemian glass-

maker, and who was older than the rest of us, and had been sent out of his country because of a love affair, beat a boy for me because we were “both foreigners.” And a boy, who grew to be the school athlete and my chief friend, beat a great many. His are the face and name that I remember — his name was of Huguenot origin and his face like his gaunt and lithe body had something of the American Indian in colour and lineament.

I was very much afraid of the other boys, and that made me doubt myself for the first time. When I had gathered pieces of wood in the corner for my great ship, I was confident that I could keep calm among the storms and die fighting when the great battle came. But now I was ashamed of my lack of courage; for I wanted to be like my grandfather who thought so little of danger that he had jumped overboard in the Bay of Biscay after an old hat. I was very much afraid of physical pain, and one day when I had made some noise in class, my friend the athlete was accused and I allowed him to get two strokes of the cane before I gave myself up. He had held out his hands without flinching and had not rubbed them on his sides afterwards. I was not caned, but was made to stand up for the rest of the lesson. I suffered very much afterwards when the thought came to me, but he did not reproach me.

I had been some years at school before I had my last fight. My friend, the athlete, had given me many months of peace, but at last refused to beat any more and said I must learn to box, and not go near the other boys till I knew how. I went home with him every day and boxed in his room, and the bouts had always the same ending. My excitability gave me an advantage at first and I would drive him across the room, and then he would drive me across and it would end very commonly with my nose bleeding. One day his father, an elderly banker, brought us out into the garden and tried to make us box in a cold-blooded, courteous way, but it was no use. At last he

said I might go near the boys again and I was no sooner inside the gate of the playing field than a boy flung a handful of mud and cried out “mad Irishman.” I hit him several times on the face without being hit, till the boys round said we should make friends. I held out my hand in fear; for I knew if we went on I should be beaten, and he took it sullenly. I had so poor a reputation as a fighter that it was a great disgrace to him, and even the masters made fun of his swollen face; and though some little boys came in a deputation to ask me to lick a boy they named, I had never another fight with a school-fellow. We had a great many fights with the street boys and the boys of a neighbouring charity school. We had always the better because we were not allowed to fling stones, and that compelled us to close or do our best to close. The monitors had been told to report any boy who fought in the street, but they only reported those who flung stones. I always ran at the athlete’s heels, but I never hit anyone. My father considered these fights absurd, and even that they were an English absurdity, and so I could not get angry enough to like hitting and being hit; and then too my friend drove the enemy before him. He had no doubts or speculations to lighten his fist upon an enemy, that, being of low behaviour, should be beaten as often as possible, and there were real wrongs to avenge: one of our boys had been killed by the blow of a stone hid in a snowball. Sometimes we on our side got into trouble with the parents of boys. There was a quarrel between the athlete and an old German who had a barber’s shop we passed every day on our way home, and one day he spat through the window and hit the German on his bald head — the monitors had not forbidden spitting. The German ran after us, but when the athlete squared up he went away. Now, though I knew it was not right to spit at people, my admiration for my friend arose to a great height. I spread his fame over the school, and next day there was a fine stir when somebody saw the old German going up the gravel walk to

the head-master's room. Presently there was such a noise in the passage that even the master had to listen. It was the head-master's red-haired brother turning the old German out and shouting to the man-servant "see that he doesn't steal the top-coats." We heard afterwards that he had asked the names of the two boys who passed his window every day and been told the names of the two head boys who passed also but were notoriously gentlemanly in their manners. Yet my friend was timid also and that restored my confidence in myself. He would often ask me to buy the sweets or the ginger-beer because he was afraid sometimes when speaking to a stranger.

I had one reputation that I valued. At first when I went to the Hammersmith swimming-baths with the other boys, I was afraid to plunge in until I had gone so far down the ladder that the water came up to my thighs; but one day when I was alone I fell from the spring-board which was five or six feet above the water. After that I would dive from a greater height than the others and I practised swimming under water and pretending not to be out of breath when I came up. And then if I ran a race, I took care not to pant or show any sign of strain. And in this I had an advantage even over the athlete; for though he could run faster and was harder to tire than anybody else, he grew very pale and I was often paid compliments. I used to run with my friend when he was training to keep him in company. He would give me a long start and soon overtake me.

I followed the career of a certain professional runner for months, buying papers that would tell me if he had won or lost. I had seen him described as "the bright particular star of American athletics," and the wonderful phrase had thrown enchantment over him. Had he been called the particular bright star, I should have cared nothing for him. I did not understand the symptom for years after. I was nursing my own dream, my form of the common

school-boy dream, though I was no longer gathering the little pieces of broken and rotting wood. Often, instead of learning my lesson, I covered the white squares of the chessboard on my little table with pen and ink pictures of myself, doing all kinds of courageous things. One day my father said “there was a man in Nelson’s ship at the battle of Trafalgar, a ship’s purser, whose hair turned white; what a sensitive temperament; that man should have achieved something!” I was vexed and bewildered, and am still bewildered and still vexed, finding it a poor and crazy thing that we who have imagined so many noble persons cannot bring our flesh to heel.

VI

The head-master was a clergyman, a good-humoured, easy-going man, as temperate, one had no doubt, in his religious life as in all else, and if he ever lost sleep on our account, it was from a very proper anxiety as to our gentility. I was in disgrace once because I went to school in some brilliant blue homespun serge my mother had bought in Devonshire, and I was told I must never wear it again. He had tried several times, though he must have known it was hopeless, to persuade our parents to put us into Eton clothes, and on certain days we were compelled to wear gloves. After my first year, we were forbidden to play marbles because it was a form of gambling and was played by nasty little boys, and a few months later told not to cross our legs in class. It was a school for the sons of professional men who had failed or were at the outset of their career, and the boys held an indignation meeting when they discovered that a new boy was an apothecary's son (I think at first I was his only friend,) and we all pretended that our parents were richer than they were. I told a little boy who had often seen my mother knitting or mending my clothes that she only mended or knitted because she liked it, though I knew it was necessity.

It was like, I suppose, most schools of its type, an obscene, bullying place, where a big boy would hit a small boy in the wind to see him double up, and where certain boys, too young for any emotion of sex, would sing the dirty songs of the street, but I daresay it suited me better than a better school. I have heard the head-master say, "how has so-and-so done in his Greek?" and the class-master reply, "very badly, but he is doing well in his cricket," and the head-master has gone away saying "Oh, leave him alone." I was unfitted for school work, and though I would often work well for weeks together, I had to give the whole evening to one lesson if I was to know it. My thoughts were a great excitement, but when I tried to do

anything with them, it was like trying to pack a balloon into a shed in a high wind. I was always near the bottom of my class, and always making excuses that but added to my timidity; but no master was rough with me. I was known to collect moths and butterflies and to get into no worse mischief than hiding now and again an old tailless white rat in my coat-pocket or my desk. There was but one interruption of our quiet habits, the brief engagement of an Irish master, a fine Greek scholar and vehement teacher, but of fantastic speech. He would open the class by saying, "there he goes, there he goes," or some like words as the head-master passed by at the end of the hall. "Of course this school is no good. How could it be with a clergyman for head-master?" And then perhaps his eye would light on me, and he would make me stand up and tell me it was a scandal I was so idle when all the world knew that any Irish boy was cleverer than a whole class-room of English boys, a description I had to pay for afterwards. Sometimes he would call up a little boy who had a girl's face and kiss him upon both cheeks and talk of taking him to Greece in the holidays, and presently we heard he had written to the boy's parents about it, but long before the holidays he was dismissed.

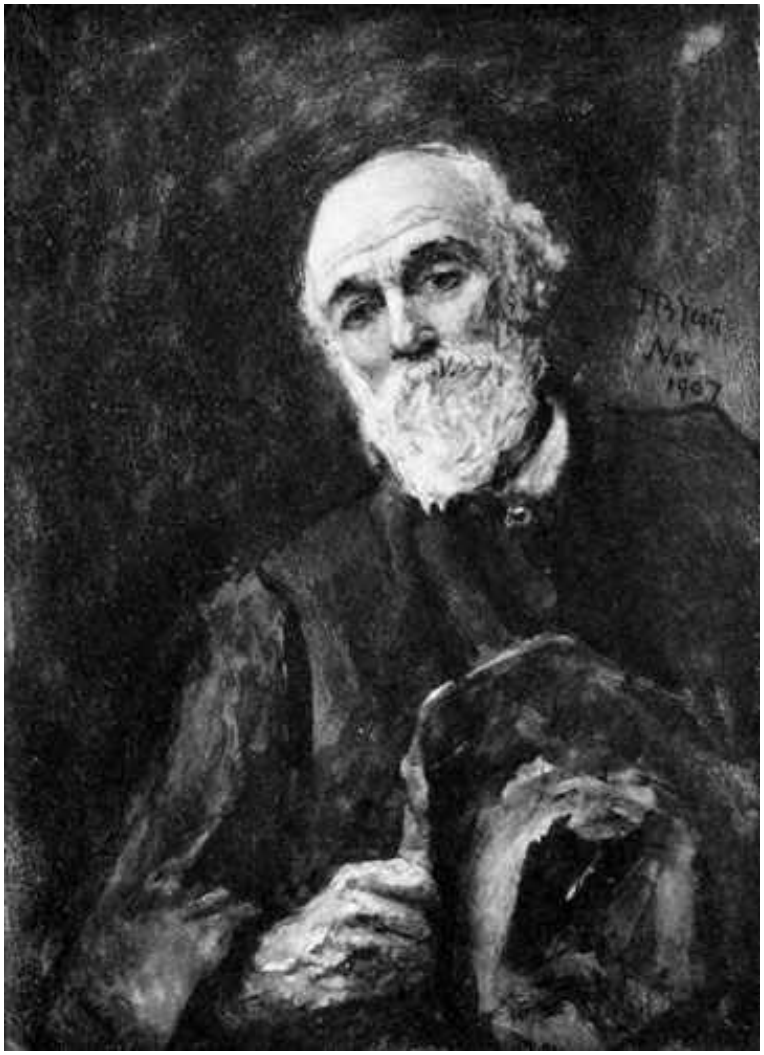
VII

Two pictures come into my memory. I have climbed to the top of a tree by the edge of the playing field, and am looking at my school-fellows and am as proud of myself as a March cock when it crows to its first sunrise. I am saying to myself, “if when I grow up I am as clever among grown-up men as I am among these boys, I shall be a famous man.” I remind myself how they think all the same things and cover the school walls at election times with the opinions their fathers find in the newspapers. I remind myself that I am an artist’s son and must take some work as the whole end of life and not think as the others do of becoming well off and living pleasantly. The other picture is of a hotel sitting-room in the Strand, where a man is hunched up over the fire. He is a cousin who has speculated with another cousin’s money and has fled from Ireland in danger of arrest. My father has brought us to spend the evening with him, to distract him from the remorse my father knows that he must be suffering.

VIII

For years Bedford Park was a romantic excitement. At North End my father had announced at breakfast that our glass chandelier was absurd and was to be taken down, and a little later he described the village Norman Shaw was building. I had thought he said, “there is to be a wall round and no newspapers to be allowed in.” And when I had told him how put out I was at finding neither wall nor gate, he explained that he had merely described what ought to be. We were to see De Morgan tiles, peacock-blue doors and the pomegranate pattern and the tulip pattern of Morris, and to discover that we had always hated doors painted with imitation grain and the roses of mid-Victoria, and tiles covered with geometrical patterns that seemed to have been shaken out of a muddy kaleidoscope. We went to live in a house like those we had seen in pictures and even met people dressed like people in the storybooks. The streets were not straight and dull as at North End, but wound about where there was a big tree or for the mere pleasure of winding, and there were wood palings instead of iron railings. The newness of everything, the empty houses where we played at hide-and-seek, and the strangeness of it all, made us feel that we were living among toys. We could imagine people living happy lives as we thought people did long ago when the poor were picturesque and the master of a house would tell of strange adventures over the sea. Only the better houses had been built. The commercial builder had not begun to copy and to cheapen, and besides we only knew the most beautiful houses, the houses of artists. My two sisters and my brother and myself had dancing lessons in a low, red-brick and tiled house that drove away dreams, long cherished, of some day living in a house made exactly like a ship’s cabin. The dining-room table, where Sinbad the sailor might have sat, was painted peacock-blue, and the woodwork was all peacock-blue and upstairs there was a window niche so

big and high up, there was a flight of steps to go up and down by and a table in the niche. The two sisters of the master of the house, a well-known pre-Raphaelite painter, were our teachers, and they and their old mother were dressed in peacock-blue and in dresses so simply cut that they seemed a part of every story. Once when I had been looking with delight at the old woman, my father who had begun to be influenced by French art, muttered, "imagine dressing up your old mother like that."



John Butler Yeats, from a watercolour drawing by himself

My father's friends were painters who had been influenced by the pre-Raphaelite movement but had lost their confidence. Wilson, Page, Nettleship, Potter are the names I remember, and at North End, I remember them most clearly. I often heard one and another say that Rossetti had never mastered his materials, and though Nettleship had already turned lion-painter, my father talked constantly of the designs of his youth, especially of "God creating Evil," which Browning praised in a letter my father had seen "as the most sublime conception in ancient or modern Art." In those early days, that he might not be tempted from his work by society, he had made a rent in the tail of his coat; and I have heard my mother tell how she had once sewn it up, but before he came again he had pulled out all the stitches. Potter's exquisite "Dormouse," now in the Tate Gallery, hung in our house for years. His dearest friend was a pretty model who was, when my memory begins, working for some position in a board-school. I can remember her sitting at the side of the throne in the North End Studio, a book in her hand and my father hearing her say a Latin lesson. Her face was the typical mild, oval face of the painting of that time, and may indeed have helped in the moulding of an ideal of beauty. I found it the other day drawn in pencil on a blank leaf of a volume of the "Earthly Paradise." It was at Bedford Park that I had heard Farrar, whom I had first known at Burnham Beeches, tell of Potter's death and burial. Potter had been very poor and had died from the effects of semi-starvation. He had lived so long on bread and tea that his stomach withered — I am sure that was the word used, and when his relations found out and gave him good food, it was too late. Farrar had been at the funeral and had stood behind some well-to-do people who were close about the grave and saw one point to the model, who had followed the hearse on foot and was now crying at a distance, and say, "that is the woman who had all his money." She had often begged him to allow

her to pay his debts, but he would not have it. Probably his rich friends blamed his poor friends, and they the rich, and I daresay, nobody had known enough to help him. Besides, he had a strange form of dissipation, I had heard someone say; he was devoted to children, and would become interested in some child — his “Dormouse” is a portrait of a child — and spend his money on its education. My sister remembers seeing him paint with a dark glove on his right hand, and his saying that he had used so much varnish the reflection of the hand would have teased him but for the glove. “I will soon have to paint my face some dark colour,” he added. I have no memory, however, but of noticing that he sat at the easel, whereas my father always stands and walks up and down, and that there was dark blue, a colour that always affects me, in the background of his picture. There is a public gallery of Wilson’s work in his native Aberdeen and my sisters have a number of his landscapes — wood-scenes for the most part — painted with phlegm and melancholy, the romantic movement drawing to its latest phase.

IX

My father read out to me, for the first time, when I was eight or nine years old. Between Sligo and Rosses Point, there is a tongue of land covered with coarse grass that runs out into the sea or the mud according to the state of the tide. It is the place where dead horses are buried. Sitting there, my father read me "The Lays of Ancient Rome." It was the first poetry that had moved me after the stable-boy's "Orange Rhymes." Later on he read me "Ivanhoe" and "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," and they are still vivid in the memory. I re-read "Ivanhoe" the other day, but it has all vanished except Gurth, the swineherd, at the outset and Friar Tuck and his venison pasty, the two scenes that laid hold of me in childhood. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" gave me a wish to turn magician that competed for years with the dream of being killed upon the sea-shore. When I first went to school, he tried to keep me from reading boys' papers, because a paper, by its very nature, as he explained to me, had to be made for the average boy or man and so could not but thwart one's growth. He took away my paper and I had not courage to say that I was but reading and delighting in a prose re-telling of the Iliad. But after a few months, my father said he had been too anxious and became less urgent about my lessons and less violent if I had learnt them badly, and he ceased to notice what I read. From that on I shared the excitement which ran through all my fellows on Wednesday afternoons when the boys' papers were published, and I read endless stories I have forgotten as completely as Grimm's Fairy Tales that I read at Sligo, and all of Hans Andersen except the Ugly Duckling which my mother had read to me and to my sisters. I remember vaguely that I liked Hans Andersen better than Grimm because he was less homely, but even he never gave me the knights and dragons and beautiful ladies that I longed for. I have remembered nothing that I read, but only those things that I heard or saw.

When I was ten or twelve my father took me to see Irving play Hamlet, and did not understand why I preferred Irving to Ellen Terry, who was, I can now see, the idol of himself and his friends. I could not think of her, as I could of Irving's Hamlet, as but myself, and I was not old enough to care for feminine charm and beauty. For many years Hamlet was an image of heroic self-possession for the poses of youth and childhood to copy, a combatant of the battle within myself. My father had read me the story of the little boy murdered by the Jews in Chaucer and the tale of Sir Topaz, explaining the hard words, and though both excited me, I had liked Sir Topaz best and been disappointed that it left off in the middle. As I grew older, he would tell me plots of Balzac's novels, using incident or character as an illustration for some profound criticism of life. Now that I have read all the Comédie Humaine, certain pages have an unnatural emphasis, straining and overbalancing the outline, and I remember how in some suburban street, he told me of Lucien de Rubempré, or of the duel after the betrayal of his master, and how the wounded Lucien had muttered "so much the worse" when he heard someone say that he was not dead.

I now can but share with a friend my thoughts and my emotions, and there is a continual discovery of difference, but in those days, before I had found myself, we could share adventures. When friends plan and do together, their minds become one mind and the last secret disappears. I was useless at games. I cannot remember that I ever kicked a goal or made a run, but I was a mine of knowledge when I and the athlete and those two notoriously gentlemanly boys — theirs was the name that I remember without a face — set out for Richmond Park, for Coomb Wood or Twyford Abbey to look for butterflies and moths and beetles. Sometimes to-day I meet people at lunch or dinner whose address will sound familiar and I remember of a sudden how a game-keeper chased me from the plantation

behind their house, and how I have turned over the cow-dung in their paddock in the search for some rare beetle believed to haunt the spot. The athlete was our watchman and our safety. He would suggest, should we meet a carriage on the drive, that we take off our hats and walk on as though about to pay a call. And once when we were sighted by a game-keeper at Coomb Wood, he persuaded the eldest of the brothers to pretend to be a school-master taking his boys for a walk, and the keeper, instead of swearing and threatening the law, was sad and argumentative. No matter how charming the place, (and there is a little stream in a hollow where Wimbledon Common flows into Coomb Wood that is pleasant in the memory,) I knew that those other boys saw something I did not see. I was a stranger there. There was something in their way of saying the names of places that made me feel this.

X

When I arrived at the Clarence Basin, Liverpool, (the dock Clarence Mangan had his first name from) on my way to Sligo for my holidays I was among Sligo people. When I was a little boy, an old woman who had come to Liverpool with crates of fowl, made me miserable by throwing her arms around me the moment I had alighted from my cab and telling the sailor who carried my luggage that she had held me in her arms when I was a baby. The sailor may have known me almost as well, for I was often at Sligo quay to sail my boat; and I came and went once or twice in every year upon the ss. *Sligo* or the ss. *Liverpool* which belonged to a company that had for directors my grandfather and his partner William Middleton. I was always pleased if it was the *Liverpool*, for she had been built to run the blockade during the war of North and South.

I waited for this voyage always with excitement and boasted to other boys about it, and when I was a little boy had walked with my feet apart as I had seen sailors walk. I used to be sea-sick, but I must have hidden this from the other boys and partly even from myself; for, as I look back, I remember very little about it, while I remember stories I was told by the captain or by his first mate, and the look of the great cliffs of Donegal & Tory Island men coming alongside with lobsters, talking Irish and, if it was night, blowing on a burning sod to draw our attention. The captain, an old man with square shoulders and a fringe of grey hair round his face, would tell his first mate, a very admiring man, of fights he had had on shore at Liverpool; and perhaps it was of him I was thinking when I was very small and asked my grandmother if God was as strong as sailors. Once, at any rate, he had been nearly wrecked; the *Liverpool* had been all but blown upon the Mull of Galloway with her shaft broken, and the captain had said to his mate, “mind and jump when she strikes, for we don’t want to be

killed by the falling spars;" and when the mate answered, "my God, I cannot swim," he had said, "who could keep afloat for five minutes in a sea like that?" He would often say his mate was the most timid of men and that "a girl along the quays could laugh him out of anything." My grandfather had more than once given the mate a ship of his own, but he had always thrown up his berth to sail with his old captain where he felt safe. Once he had been put in charge of a ship in a dry dock in Liverpool, but a boy was drowned in Sligo, and before the news could reach him he wired to his wife, "ghost, come at once, or I will throw up berth." He had been wrecked a number of times and maybe that had broken his nerve or maybe he had a sensitiveness that would in another class have given him taste & culture. I once forgot a copy of "Count Robert of Paris" on a deck-seat, and when I found it again, it was all covered with the prints of his dirty thumb. He had once seen the coach-a-baur or death coach. It came along the road, he said, till it was hidden by a cottage and it never came out on the other side of the cottage. Once I smelled new-mown hay when we were quite a long way from land, and once when I was watching the sea-parrots (as the sailors call the puffin) I noticed they had different ways of tucking their heads under their wings, or I fancied it and said to the captain "they have different characters." Sometimes my father came too, and the sailors when they saw him coming would say "there is John Yeats and we shall have a storm," for he was considered unlucky.

I no longer cared for little shut-in-places, for a coppice against the stable-yard at Merville where my grandfather lived or against the gable at Seaview where Aunt Micky lived, and I began to climb the mountains, sometimes with the stable-boy for companion, and to look up their stories in the county history. I fished for trout with a worm in the mountain streams and went out herring-fishing at night: and because my grandfather had said

the English were in the right to eat skates, I carried a large skate all the six miles or so from Rosses Point, but my grandfather did not eat it.

One night just as the equinoctial gales were coming when I was sailing home in the coastguard's boat a boy told me a beetle of solid gold, strayed maybe from Poe's "gold bug," had been seen by somebody in Scotland and I do not think that either of us doubted his news. Indeed, so many stories did I hear from sailors along the wharf, or round the fo'castle fire of the little steamer that ran between Sligo and Rosses, or from boys out fishing that the world was full of monsters and marvels. The foreign sailors wearing ear-rings did not tell me stories, but like the fishing boys, I gazed at them in wonder and admiration. When I look at my brother's picture, "Memory Harbour," houses and anchored ship and distant lighthouse all set close together as in some old map, I recognize in the blue-coated man with the mass of white shirt the pilot I went fishing with, and I am full of disquiet and of excitement, and I am melancholy because I have not made more and better verses. I have walked on Sinbad's yellow shore and never shall another hit my fancy.

I had still my red pony, and once my father came with me riding too, and was very exacting. He was indignant and threatening because he did not think I rode well. "You must do everything well," he said, "that the Pollexfens respect, though you must do other things also." He used to say the same about my lessons, and tell me to be good at mathematics. I can see now that he had a sense of inferiority among those energetic, successful people. He himself, some Pollexfen told me, though he rode very badly, would go hunting upon anything and take any ditch. His father, the County Down Rector, though a courtly man and a scholar, had been so dandified a horseman that I had heard of his splitting three riding breeches before he

had settled into his saddle for a day's hunting, and of his first rector exclaiming, "I had hoped for a curate but they have sent me a jockey."

Left to myself, I rode without ambition though getting many falls, and more often to Rathbroughan where my great-uncle Mat lived, than to any place else. His children and I used to sail our toy-boats in the river before his house, arming them with toy-cannon, touch-paper at all the touch-holes, always hoping but always in vain that they would not twist about in the eddies but fire their cannon at one another. I must have gone to Sligo sometimes in the Christmas holidays, for I can remember riding my red pony to a hunt. He balked at the first jump, to my relief, and when a crowd of boys began to beat him, I would not allow it. They all jeered at me for being afraid. I found a gap and when I was alone in a field tried another ditch, but the pony would not jump that either; so I tied him to a tree and lay down among the ferns and looked up into the sky. On my way home I met the hunt again and noticed that everybody avoided the dogs, and because I wanted to find out why they did so I rode to where the dogs had gathered in the middle of the lane and stood my pony amongst them, and everybody began to shout at me.

Sometimes I would ride to Castle Dargan, where lived a brawling squireen, married to one of my Middleton cousins, and once I went thither on a visit with my cousin George Middleton. It was, I dare say, the last household where I could have found the reckless Ireland of a hundred years ago in final degradation. But I liked the place for the romance of its two ruined castles facing one another across a little lake, Castle Dargan and Castle Fury. The squireen lived in a small house whither his family had moved from their castle some time in the 18th century, and two old Miss Furys, who let lodgings in Sligo, were the last remnants of the breed of the other ruin. Once in every year he drove to Sligo for the two old women, that

they might look upon the ancestral stones and remember their gentility, and he would put his wildest horses into the shafts to enjoy their terror.

He himself, with a reeling imagination, knew not what he could be at to find a spur for the heavy hours. The first day I came there, he gave my cousin a revolver, (we were upon the high road,) and to show it off, or his own shooting, he shot a passing chicken; and half an hour later, when he had brought us to the lake's edge under his castle, now but the broken corner of a tower with a winding stair, he fired at or over an old countryman who was walking on the far edge of the lake. The next day I heard him settling the matter with the old countryman over a bottle of whiskey, and both were in good humour. Once he had asked a timid aunt of mine if she would like to see his last new pet, and thereupon had marched a race-horse in through the hall door and round the dining-room table. And once she came down to a bare table because he had thought it a good joke to open the window and let his harriers eat the breakfast. There was a current story, too, of his shooting, in the pride of his marksmanship, at his own door with a Martini-Henry rifle till he had shot the knocker off. At last he quarrelled with my great-uncle William Middleton, and to avenge himself gathered a rabble of wild country-lads and mounted them and himself upon the most broken-down rascally horses he could lay hands on and marched them through Sligo under a land-league banner. After that, having neither friends nor money, he made off to Australia or to Canada. I fished for pike at Castle Dargan and shot at birds with a muzzle-loading pistol until somebody shot a rabbit and I heard it squeal. From that on I would kill nothing but the dumb fish.

XI

We left Bedford Park for a long thatched house at Howth, Co. Dublin. The land war was now at its height and our Kildare land, that had been in the family for many generations, was slipping from us. Rents had fallen more and more, we had to sell to pay some charge or mortgage, but my father and his tenants parted without ill-will. During the worst times an old tenant had under his roof my father's shooting-dog and gave it better care than the annual payment earned. He had set apart for its comfort the best place at the fire; and if some man were in the place when the dog walked into the house, the man must needs make room for the dog. And a good while after the sale, I can remember my father being called upon to settle some dispute between this old man and his sons.

I was now fifteen; and as he did not want to leave his painting my father told me to go to Harcourt Street and put myself to school. I found a bleak 18th century house and a small playing-field full of mud and pebbles, fenced by an iron railing from a wide 18th century street, but opposite a long hoarding and a squalid, ornamental railway station. Here, as I soon found, nobody gave a thought to decorum. We worked in a din of voices. We began the morning with prayers, but when class began the head-master, if he was in the humour, would laugh at Church and Clergy. "Let them say what they like," he would say, "but the earth does go round the sun." On the other hand there was no bullying and I had not thought it possible that boys could work so hard. Cricket and football, the collection of moths and butterflies, though not forbidden, were discouraged. They were for idle boys. I did not know, as I used to, the mass of my school-fellows; for we had little life in common outside the class-rooms. I had begun to think of my school-work as an interruption of my natural history studies, but even had I never opened a book not in the school course, I could not have learned

a quarter of my night's work. I had always done Euclid easily, making the problems out while the other boys were blundering at the blackboard, and it had often carried me from the bottom to the top of my class; but these boys had the same natural gift and instead of being in the fourth or fifth book were in the modern books at the end of the primer; and in place of a dozen lines of Virgil with a dictionary, I was expected to learn with the help of a crib a hundred and fifty lines. The other boys were able to learn the translation off, and to remember what words of Latin and English corresponded with one another, but I, who it may be had tried to find out what happened in the parts we had not read, made ridiculous mistakes; and what could I, who never worked when I was not interested, do with a history lesson that was but a column of seventy dates? I was worst of all at literature, for we read Shakespeare for his grammar exclusively.

One day I had a lucky thought. A great many lessons were run through in the last hour of the day, things we had learnt or should have learnt by heart over night, and after not having known one of them for weeks, I cut off that hour without anybody's leave. I asked the mathematical master to give me a sum to work and nobody said a word. My father often interfered, and always with disaster, to teach me my Latin lesson. "But I have also my geography," I would say. "Geography," he would reply, "should never be taught. It is not a training for the mind. You will pick up all that you need, in your general reading." And if it was a history lesson, he would say just the same, and "Euclid," he would say, "is too easy. It comes naturally to the literary imagination. The old idea, that it is a good training for the mind, was long ago refuted." I would know my Latin lesson so that it was a nine days' wonder, and for weeks after would be told it was scandalous to be so clever and so idle. No one knew that I had learnt it in the terror that alone could check my wandering mind. I must have told on him at some time or

other for I remember the head-master saying, “I am going to give you an imposition because I cannot get at your father to give him one.” Sometimes we had essays to write; & though I never got a prize, for the essays were judged by hand-writing and spelling I caused a measure of scandal. I would be called up before some master and asked if I really believed such things, and that would make me angry for I had written what I had believed all my life, what my father had told me, or a memory of the conversation of his friends. There were other beliefs, but they were held by people one did not know, people who were vulgar or stupid. I was asked to write an essay on “men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things.” My father read the subject to my mother, who had no interest in such matters. “That is the way,” he said, “boys are made insincere and false to themselves. Ideals make the blood thin, and take the human nature out of people.” He walked up and down the room in eloquent indignation, and told me not to write on such a subject at all, but upon Shakespeare’s lines “to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man.” At another time, he would denounce the idea of duty, and “imagine,” he would say, “how the right sort of woman would despise a dutiful husband;” and he would tell us how much my mother would scorn such a thing. Maybe there were people among whom such ideas were natural, but they were the people with whom one does not dine. All he said was, I now believe right, but he should have taken me away from school. He would have taught me nothing but Greek and Latin, and I would now be a properly educated man, and would not have to look in useless longing at books that have been, through the poor mechanism of translation, the builders of my soul, nor faced authority with the timidity born of excuse and evasion. Evasion and excuse were in the event as wise as the house-building instinct of the beaver.

XII

My London schoolfellow, the athlete, spent a summer with us, but the friendship of boyhood, founded upon action and adventure, was drawing to an end. He was still my superior in all physical activity and climbed to places among the rocks that even now are uncomfortable memories, but I had begun to criticize him. One morning I proposed a journey to Lambay Island, and was contemptuous because he said we should miss our mid-day meal. We hoisted a sail on our small boat and ran quickly over the nine miles and saw on the shore a tame sea-gull, while a couple of boys, the sons of a coastguard, ran into the water in their clothes to pull us to land, as we had read of savage people doing. We spent an hour upon the sunny shore and I said, “I would like to live here always, and perhaps some day I will.” I was always discovering places where I would like to spend my whole life. We started to row home, and when dinner-time had passed for about an hour, the athlete lay down on the bottom of the boat doubled up with the gripes. I mocked at him and at his fellow-countrymen whose stomachs struck the hour as if they were clocks.

Our natural history, too, began to pull us apart. I planned some day to write a book about the changes through a twelve-month among the creatures of some hole in the rock, and had some theory of my own, which I cannot remember, as to the colour of sea-anemones: and after much hesitation, trouble and bewilderment, was hot for argument in refutation of Adam and Noah and the Seven Days. I had read Darwin and Wallace, Huxley and Haeckel, and would spend hours on a holiday plaguing a pious geologist, who, when not at some job in Guinness’s brewery, came with a hammer to look for fossils in the Howth Cliffs. “You know,” I would say, “that such and such human remains cannot be less, because of the strata they were found in, than fifty thousand years old.” “Oh!” he would answer,

“they are an isolated instance.” And once when I pressed hard my case against Ussher’s chronology, he begged me not to speak of the subject again. “If I believed what you do,” he said, “I could not live a moral life.” But I could not even argue with the athlete who still collected his butterflies for the adventure’s sake, and with no curiosity but for their names. I began to judge his intelligence, and to tell him that his natural history had as little to do with science as his collection of postage stamps. Even during my school days in London, influenced perhaps by my father, I had looked down upon the postage stamps.

XIII

Our house for the first year or so was on the top of a cliff, so that in stormy weather the spray would sometimes soak my bed at night, for I had taken the glass out of the window, sash and all. A literary passion for the open air was to last me for a few years. Then for another year or two, we had a house overlooking the harbour where the one great sight was the going and coming of the fishing fleet. We had one regular servant, a fisherman's wife, and the occasional help of a big, red-faced girl who ate a whole pot of jam while my mother was at church and accused me of it. Some such arrangement lasted until long after the time I write of, and until my father going into the kitchen by chance found a girl, who had been engaged during a passing need, in tears at the thought of leaving our other servant, and promised that they should never be parted. I have no doubt that we lived at the harbour for my mother's sake. She had, when we were children, refused to take us to a seaside place because she heard it possessed a bathing box, but she loved the activities of a fishing village. When I think of her, I almost always see her talking over a cup of tea in the kitchen with our servant, the fisherman's wife, on the only themes outside our house that seemed of interest — the fishing people of Howth, or the pilots and fishing people of Rosses Point. She read no books, but she and the fisherman's wife would tell each other stories that Homer might have told, pleased with any moment of sudden intensity and laughing together over any point of satire. There is an essay called "Village Ghosts" in my "Celtic Twilight" which is but a record of one such afternoon, and many a fine tale has been lost because it had not occurred to me soon enough to keep notes. My father was always praising her to my sisters and to me, because she pretended to nothing she did not feel. She would write him letters telling of her delight in the tumbling clouds, but she did not care for pictures, and never went to an

exhibition even to see a picture of his, nor to his studio to see the day's work, neither now nor when they were first married. I remember all this very clearly and little after until her mind had gone in a stroke of paralysis and she had found, liberated at last from financial worry, perfect happiness feeding the birds at a London window. She had always, my father would say, intensity, and that was his chief word of praise; and once he added to the praise "no spendthrift ever had a poet for a son, though a miser might."

XIV

The great event of a boy's life is the awakening of sex. He will bathe many times a day, or get up at dawn and having stripped leap to and fro over a stick laid upon two chairs and hardly know, and never admit, that he had begun to take pleasure in his own nakedness, nor will he understand the change until some dream discovers it. He may never understand at all the greater change in his mind.

It all came upon me when I was close upon seventeen like the bursting of a shell. Somnambulistic country-girls, when it is upon them, throw plates about or pull them with long hairs in simulation of the polter-geist, or become mediums for some genuine spirit-mischief, surrendering to their desire of the marvellous. As I look backward, I seem to discover that my passions, my loves and my despairs, instead of being my enemies, a disturbance and an attack, became so beautiful that I must be constantly alone to give them my whole attention. I notice that, for the first time as I run through my memory, what I saw when alone is more vivid than what I did or saw in company.

A herd had shown me a cave some hundred and fifty feet below the cliff path and a couple of hundred above the sea, and told me how an evicted tenant called Macrom, dead some fifteen years, had lived there many years, and shown me a rusty nail in the rock which had served perhaps to hold up some wooden protection from wind and weather. Here I stored a tin of cocoa and some biscuits, and instead of going to my bed, would slip out on warm nights and sleep in the cave on the excuse of catching moths. One had to pass over a rocky ledge, safe enough for anyone with a fair head, yet seeming, if looked at from above, narrow and sloping; and a remonstrance from a stranger who had seen me climbing along it doubled my delight in the adventure. When however, upon a bank holiday, I found lovers in my

cave, I was not content with it again till I heard of alarm among the fishing boats, because the ghost of Macrom had been seen a little before the dawn, stooping over his fire in the cave-mouth. I had been trying to cook eggs, as I had read in some book, by burying them in the earth under a fire of sticks.

At other times, I would sleep among the rhododendrons and rocks in the wilder part of the grounds of Howth Castle. After a while my father said I must stay in-doors half the night, meaning that I should get some sleep in my bed; but I, knowing that I would be too sleepy and comfortable to get up again, used to sit over the kitchen fire till half the night was gone. Exaggerated accounts spread through the school, and sometimes when I did not know a lesson some master would banter me. My interest in science began to fade away, and presently I said to myself, "it has all been a misunderstanding." I remembered how soon I tired of my specimens, and how little I knew after all my years of collecting, and I came to believe that I had gone through so much labour because of a text, heard for the first time in St. John's Church in Sligo. I wanted to be certain of my own wisdom by copying Solomon, who had knowledge of hyssop and of tree. I still carried my green net but I began to play at being a sage, a magician or a poet. I had many idols, and now as I climbed along the narrow ledge I was Manfred on his glacier, and now I thought of Prince Athanase and his solitary lamp, but I soon chose Alastor for my chief of men and longed to share his melancholy, and maybe at last to disappear from everybody's sight as he disappeared drifting in a boat along some slow-moving river between great trees. When I thought of women they were modelled on those in my favourite poets and loved in brief tragedy, or, like the girl in "The Revolt of Islam," accompanied their lovers through all manner of wild places, lawless women without homes and without children.

XV

My father's influence upon my thoughts was at its height. We went to Dublin by train every morning, breakfasting in his studio. He had taken a large room with a beautiful 18th century mantle-piece in a York Street tenement house, and at breakfast he read passages from the poets, and always from the play or poem at its most passionate moment. He never read me a passage because of its speculative interest, and indeed did not care at all for poetry where there was generalisation or abstraction however impassioned. He would read out the first speeches of the Prometheus Unbound, but never the ecstatic lyricism of that famous fourth act; and another day the scene where Coriolanus comes to the house of Aufidius and tells the impudent servants that his home is under the canopy. I have seen Coriolanus played a number of times since then, and read it more than once, but that scene is more vivid than the rest, and it is my father's voice that I hear and not Irving's or Benson's. He did not care even for a fine lyric passage unless one felt some actual man behind its elaboration of beauty, and he was always looking for the lineaments of some desirable, familiar life. When the spirits sang their scorn of Manfred I was to judge by Manfred's answer "O sweet and melancholy voices" that they could not, even in anger, put off their spiritual sweetness. He thought Keats a greater poet than Shelley, because less abstract, but did not read him, caring little, I think, for any of that most beautiful poetry which has come in modern times from the influence of painting. All must be an idealisation of speech, and at some moment of passionate action or somnambulistic reverie. I remember his saying that all contemplative men were in a conspiracy to overrate their state of life, and that all writers were of them, excepting the great poets. Looking backwards, it seems to me that I saw his mind in fragments, which had always hidden connections I only now begin to discover. He disliked

the Victorian poetry of ideas, and Wordsworth but for certain passages or whole poems. He described one morning over his breakfast how in the shape of the head of a Wordsworthian scholar, an old and greatly respected clergyman whose portrait he was painting, he had discovered all the animal instincts of a prizefighter. He despised the formal beauty of Raphael, that calm which is not an ordered passion but an hypocrisy, and attacked Raphael's life for its love of pleasure and its self-indulgence. In literature he was always pre-Raphaelite, and carried into literature principles that, while the Academy was still unbroken, had made the first attack upon academic form. He no longer read me anything for its story, and all our discussion was of style.

XVI

I began to make blunders when I paid calls or visits, and a woman I had known and liked as a child told me I had changed for the worse. I had wanted to be wise and eloquent, an essay on the younger Ampère had helped me to this ambition, and when I was alone I exaggerated my blunders and was miserable. I had begun to write poetry in imitation of Shelley and of Edmund Spenser, play after play — for my father exalted dramatic poetry above all other kinds — and I invented fantastic and incoherent plots. My lines but seldom scanned, for I could not understand the prosody in the books, although there were many lines that taken by themselves had music. I spoke them slowly as I wrote and only discovered when I read them to somebody else that there was no common music, no prosody. There were, however, moments of observation; for, even when I caught moths no longer, I still noticed all that passed; how the little moths came out at sunset, and how after that there were only a few big moths till dawn brought little moths again; and what birds cried out at night as if in their sleep.

XVII

At Sligo, where I still went for my holidays, I stayed with my uncle, George Pollexfen, who had come from Ballina to fill the place of my grandfather, who had retired. My grandfather had no longer his big house, his partner William Middleton was dead, and there had been legal trouble. He was no longer the rich man he had been, and his sons and daughters were married and scattered. He had a tall, bare house overlooking the harbour, and had nothing to do but work himself into a rage if he saw a mudlighter mismanaged or judged from the smoke of a steamer that she was burning cheap coal, and to superintend the making of his tomb. There was a Middleton tomb and a long list of Middletons on the wall, and an almost empty place for Pollexfen names, but he had said, because there was a Middleton there he did not like, "I am not going to lie with those old bones;" and already one saw his name in large gilt letters on the stone fence of the new tomb. He ended his walk at St. John's churchyard almost daily, for he liked everything neat and compendious as upon shipboard, and if he had not looked after the tomb himself the builder might have added some useless ornament. He had, however, all his old skill and nerve. I was going to Rosses Point on the little trading steamer and saw him take the wheel from the helmsman and steer her through a gap in the channel wall, and across the sand, an unheard-of-course, and at the journey's end bring her alongside her wharf at Rosses without the accustomed zigzagging or pulling on a rope but in a single movement. He took snuff when he had a cold, but had never smoked or taken alcohol; and when in his eightieth year his doctor advised a stimulant, he replied, "no, no, I am not going to form a bad habit."

My brother had partly taken my place in my grandmother's affections. He had lived permanently in her house for some years now, and went to a

Sligo school where he was always bottom of his class. My grandmother did not mind that, for she said, “he is too kind-hearted to pass the other boys.” He spent his free hours going here and there with crowds of little boys, sons of pilots and sailors, as their well-liked leader, arranging donkey races or driving donkeys tandem, an occupation which requires all one’s intellect because of their obstinacy. Besides he had begun to amuse everybody with his drawings; and in half the pictures he paints to-day I recognise faces that I have met at Rosses or the Sligo quays. It is long since he has lived there, but his memory seems as accurate as the sight of the eye.

George Pollexfen was as patient as his father was impetuous, and did all by habit. A well-to-do, elderly man, he lived with no more comfort than when he had set out as a young man. He had a little house and one old general servant and a man to look after his horse, and every year he gave up some activity and found that there was one more food that disagreed with him. A hypochondriac, he passed from winter to summer through a series of woollens that had always to be weighed; for in April or May or whatever the date was he had to be sure he carried the exact number of ounces he had carried upon that date since boyhood. He lived in despondency, finding in the most cheerful news reasons of discouragement, and sighing every twenty-second of June over the shortening of the days. Once in later years, when I met him in Dublin sweating in a midsummer noon, I brought him into the hall of the Kildare Street Library, a cool and shady place, without lightening his spirits; for he but said in a melancholy voice, “how very cold this place must be in winter time.” Sometimes when I had pitted my cheerfulness against his gloom over the breakfast table, maintaining that neither his talent nor his memory nor his health were running to the dregs, he would rout me with the sentence, “how very old I shall be in twenty years.” Yet this inactive man, in whom the sap of life seemed to be dried

away, had a mind full of pictures. Nothing had ever happened to him except a love affair, not I think very passionate, that had gone wrong, and a voyage when a young man. My grandfather had sent him in a schooner to a port in Spain where the shipping agents were two Spaniards called O'Neill, descendants of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, who had fled from Ireland in the reign of James I; and their Irish trade was a last remnant of the Spanish trade that had once made Galway wealthy. For some years he and they had corresponded, for they cherished the memory of their origin. In some Connaught burying ground, he had chanced upon the funeral of a child with but one mourner, a distinguished foreign-looking man. It was an Austrian count burying the last of an Irish family, long nobles of Austria, who were always carried to that half-ruined burying ground.

My uncle had almost given up hunting and was soon to give it up altogether, and he had once ridden steeple-chases and been, his horse-trainer said, the best rider in Connaught. He had certainly great knowledge of horses, for I have been told, several counties away, that at Ballina he cured horses by conjuring. He had, however, merely great skill in diagnosis, for the day was still far off when he was to give his nights to astrology and ceremonial magic. His servant, Mary Battle, who had been with him since he was a young man, had the second sight and that, maybe, inclined him to strange studies. He would tell how more than once when he had brought home a guest without giving her notice he had found the dinner-table set for two, and one morning she was about to bring him a clean shirt, but stopped saying there was blood on the shirt-front and that she must bring him another. On his way to his office he fell, crossing over a little wall, and cut himself and bled on to the linen where she had seen the blood. In the evening, she told how surprised she had been to find when she looked again that the shirt she had thought bloody was quite clean. She could neither read

nor write and her mind, which answered his gloom with its merriment, was rammed with every sort of old history and strange belief. Much of my "Celtic Twilight" is but her daily speech.

My uncle had the respect of the common people as few Sligo men have had it; he would have thought a stronger emotion an intrusion on his privacy. He gave to all men the respect due to their station or their worth with an added measure of ceremony, and kept among his workmen a discipline that had about it something of a regiment or a ship, knowing nothing of any but personal authority. If a carter, let us say, was in fault, he would not dismiss him, but send for him and take his whip away and hang it upon the wall; and having reduced the offender, as it were, to the ranks for certain months, would restore him to his post and his whip. This man of diligence and of method, who had no enterprise but in contemplation, and claimed that his wealth, considerable for Ireland, came from a brother's or partner's talent, was the confidant of my boyish freaks and reveries. When I said to him, echoing some book I had read, that one never knew a countryside till one knew it at night, (though nothing would have kept him from his bed a moment beyond the hour) he was pleased; for he loved natural things and had learnt two cries of the lapwing, one that drew them to where he stood and one that made them fly away. And he approved, and arranged my meals conveniently, when I told him I was going to walk round Lough Gill and sleep in a wood. I did not tell him all my object, for I was nursing a new ambition. My father had read to me some passage out of "Walden," and I planned to live some day in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree, and Innisfree was opposite Slish Wood where I meant to sleep.

I thought that having conquered bodily desire and the inclination of my mind towards women and love, I should live, as Thoreau lived, seeking

wisdom. There was a story in the county history of a tree that had once grown upon that island guarded by some terrible monster and borne the food of the gods. A young girl pined for the fruit and told her lover to kill the monster and carry the fruit away. He did as he had been told, but tasted the fruit; and when he reached the mainland where she had waited for him, was dying of its powerful virtue. And from sorrow and from remorse she too ate of it and died. I do not remember whether I chose the island because of its beauty or for the story's sake, but I was twenty-two or three before I gave up the dream.

I set out from Sligo about six in the evening, walking slowly, for it was an evening of great beauty; but though I was well into Slish Wood by bed-time, I could not sleep, not from the discomfort of the dry rock I had chosen for my bed, but from my fear of the wood-ranger. Somebody had told me, though I do not think it could have been true, that he went his round at some unknown hour. I kept going over what I should say if I was found and could not think of anything he would believe. However, I could watch my island in the early dawn and notice the order of the cries of the birds.

I came home next day unimaginably tired & sleepy, having walked some thirty miles partly over rough and boggy ground. For months afterwards, if I alluded to my walk, my uncle's general servant (not Mary Battle, who was slowly recovering from an illness and would not have taken the liberty) would go into fits of laughter. She believed I had spend the night in a different fashion and had invented the excuse to deceive my uncle, and would say to my great embarrassment, for I was as prudish as an old maid, "and you had good right to be fatigued."

Once when staying with my uncle at Rosses Point where he went for certain months of the year, I called upon a cousin towards midnight and asked him to get his yacht out, for I wanted to find what sea birds began to

stir before dawn. He was indignant and refused; but his elder sister had overheard me and came to the head of the stairs and forbade him to stir, and that so vexed him that he shouted to the kitchen for his sea-boots. He came with me in great gloom for he had people's respect, he declared, and nobody so far had said that he was mad as they said I was, and we got a very sleepy boy out of his bed in the village and set up sail. We put a trawl out, as he thought it would restore his character if he caught some fish, but the wind fell and we were becalmed. I rolled myself in the main-sail and went to sleep for I could sleep anywhere in those days. I was awakened towards dawn to see my cousin and the boy turning out their pockets for money and to rummage in my own pockets. A boat was rowing in from Roughley with fish and they wanted to buy some and would pretend they had caught it, but all our pockets were empty. It was for the poem that became fifteen years afterwards "The Shadowy Waters" that I had wanted the birds' cries, and it had been full of observation had I been able to write it when I first planned it. I had found again the windy light that moved me when a child. I persuaded myself that I had a passion for the dawn, and this passion, though mainly histrionic like a child's play, an ambitious game, had moments of sincerity. Years afterwards when I had finished "The Wanderings of Oisin," dissatisfied with its yellow and its dull green, with all that overcharged colour inherited from the romantic movement, I deliberately reshaped my style, deliberately sought out an impression as of cold light and tumbling clouds. I cast off traditional metaphors and loosened my rhythm, and recognizing that all the criticism of life known to me was alien and English, became as emotional as possible but with an emotion which I described to myself as cold. It is a natural conviction for a painter's son to believe that there may be a landscape symbolical of some spiritual condition that awakens a hunger such as cats feel for valerian.

XVIII

I was writing a long play on a fable suggested by one of my father's early designs. A king's daughter loves a god seen in the luminous sky above her garden in childhood, and to be worthy of him and put away mortality, becomes without pity & commits crimes, and at last, having made her way to the throne by murder, awaits the hour among her courtiers. One by one they become chilly and drop dead, for, unseen by all but her, her god is walking through the hall. At last he is at her throne's foot and she, her mind in the garden once again, dies babbling like a child.

XIX

Once when I was sailing with my cousin, the boy who was our crew talked of a music-hall at a neighbouring seaport, and how the girls there gave themselves to men, and his language was as extravagant as though he praised that courtezan after whom they named a city or the queen of Sheba herself. Another day he wanted my cousin to sail some fifty miles along the coast and put in near some cottages where he had heard there were girls "and we would have a great welcome before us." He pleaded with excitement (I imagine that his eyes shone) but hardly hoped to persuade us, and perhaps but played with fabulous images of life and of sex. A young jockey and horse-trainer, who had trained some horses for my uncle, once talked to me of wicked England while we cooked a turkey for our Christmas dinner making it twist about on a string in front of his harness-room fire. He had met two lords in England where he had gone racing, who "always exchanged wives when they went to the Continent for a holiday." He himself had once been led into temptation and was going home with a woman, but having touched his scapular by chance, saw in a moment an angel waving white wings in the air. Presently I was to meet him no more and my uncle said he had done something disgraceful about a horse.

XX

I was climbing up a hill at Howth when I heard wheels behind me and a pony-carriage drew up beside me. A pretty girl was driving alone and without a hat. She told me her name and said we had friends in common and asked me to ride beside her. After that I saw a great deal of her and was soon in love. I did not tell her I was in love, however, because she was engaged. She had chosen me for her confidant and I learned all about her quarrels with her lover. Several times he broke the engagement off, and she would fall ill, and friends would make peace. Sometimes she would write to him three times a day, but she could not do without a confidant. She was a wild creature, a fine mimic and given to bursts of religion. I have known her to weep at a sermon, call herself a sinful woman, and mimic it after. I wrote her some bad poems and had more than one sleepless night through anger with her betrothed.

XXI

At Ballisodare an event happened that brought me back to the superstitions of my childhood. I do not know when it was, for the events of this period have as little sequence as those of childhood. I was staying with cousins at Avena house, a young man a few years older and a girl of my own age and perhaps her sister who was a good deal older. My girl cousin had often told me of strange sights she had seen at Ballisodare or Rosses. An old woman three or four feet in height and leaning on a stick had once come to the window and looked in at her, and sometimes she would meet people on the road who would say "how is so-and-so," naming some member of her family, and she would know, though she could not explain how, that they were not people of this world. Once she had lost her way in a familiar field, and when she found it again the silver mounting on a walking-stick belonging to her brother which she carried had vanished. An old woman in the village said afterwards "you have good friends amongst them, and the silver was taken instead of you."

Though it was all years ago, what I am going to tell now must be accurate, for no great while ago she wrote out her unprompted memory of it all and it was the same as mine. She was sitting under an old-fashioned mirror reading and I was reading in another part of the room. Suddenly I heard a sound as if somebody was throwing a shower of peas at the mirror. I got her to go into the next room and rap with her knuckles on the other side of the wall to see if the sound could come from there, and while I was alone a great thump came close to my head upon the wainscot and on a different wall of the room. Later in the day a servant heard a heavy footstep going through the empty house, and that night, when I and my two cousins went for a walk, she saw the ground under some trees all in a blaze of light. I saw nothing, but presently we crossed the river and went along its edge where,

they say, there was a village destroyed, I think in the wars of the 17th century, and near an old grave-yard. Suddenly we all saw light moving over the river where there is a great rush of waters. It was like a very brilliant torch. A moment later the girl saw a man coming towards us who disappeared in the water. I kept asking myself if I could be deceived. Perhaps after all, though it seemed impossible, somebody was walking in the water with a torch. But we could see a small light low down on Knock-na-rea seven miles off, and it began to move upward over the mountain slope. I timed it on my watch and in five minutes it reached the summit, and I, who had often climbed the mountain, knew that no human footstep was so speedy.

From that on I wandered about raths and faery hills and questioned old women and old men and, when I was tired out or unhappy, began to long for some such end as True Thomas found. I did not believe with my intellect that you could be carried away body and soul, but I believed with my emotions and the belief of the country people made that easy. Once when I had crawled into the stone passage in some rath of the third Rosses, the pilot who had come with me called down the passage: “are you all right, sir?”

And one night as I came near the village of Rosses on the road from Sligo, a fire blazed up on a green bank at my right side seven or eight feet above me, and another fire suddenly answered from Knock-na-rea. I hurried on doubting, and yet hardly doubting in my heart that I saw again the fires that I had seen by the river at Ballisodare. I began occasionally telling people that one should believe whatever had been believed in all countries and periods, and only reject any part of it after much evidence, instead of starting all over afresh and only believing what one could prove. But I was always ready to deny or turn into a joke what was for all that my secret

fanaticism. When I had read Darwin and Huxley and believed as they did, I had wanted, because an established authority was upon my side, to argue with everybody.

XXII

I no longer went to the Harcourt Street school and we had moved from Howth to Rathgar. I was at the Arts schools in Kildare Street, but my father, who came to the school now and then, was my teacher. The masters left me alone, for they liked a very smooth surface and a very neat outline, and indeed understood nothing but neatness and smoothness. A drawing of the Discobolus, after my father had touched it, making the shoulder stand out with swift and broken lines, had no meaning for them; and for the most part I exaggerated all that my father did. Sometimes indeed, out of rivalry to some student near, I too would try to be smooth and neat. One day I helped the student next me, who certainly had no artistic gifts, to make a drawing of some plaster fruit. In his gratitude he told me his history. "I don't care for art," he said. "I am a good billiard player, one of the best in Dublin; but my guardian said I must take a profession, so I asked my friends to tell me where I would not have to pass an examination, and here I am." It may be that I myself was there for no better reason. My father had wanted me to go to Trinity College and, when I would not, had said, "my father and grandfather and great-grandfather have been there." I did not tell him my reason was that I did not believe my classics or my mathematics good enough for any examination.

I had for fellow-student an unhappy "village genius" sent to Dublin by some charitable Connaught landlord. He painted religious pictures upon sheets nailed to the wall of his bedroom, a "Last Judgment" among the rest. Then there was a wild young man who would come to school of a morning with a daisy-chain hung round his neck; and George Russel, "Æ," the poet, and mystic. He did not paint the model as we tried to, for some other image rose always before his eyes (a St. John in the Desert I remember,) and already he spoke to us of his visions. His conversation, so lucid and

vehement to-day, was all but incomprehensible, though now and again some phrase would be understood and repeated. One day he announced that he was leaving the Art schools because his will was weak and the arts or any other emotional pursuit could but weaken it further.

Presently I went to the modelling class to be with certain elder students who had authority among us. Among these were John Hughes and Oliver Sheppard, well-known now as Irish sculptors. The day I first went into the studio where they worked, I stood still upon the threshold in amazement. A pretty gentle-looking girl was modelling in the middle of the room, and all the men were swearing at her for getting in their light with the most violent and fantastic oaths, and calling her every sort of name, and through it all she worked in undisturbed diligence. Presently the man nearest me saw my face and called out, "she is stone deaf, so we always swear at her and call her names when she gets in our light." In reality I soon found that everyone was kind to her, carrying her drawing-boards and the like, and putting her into the tram at the day's end. We had no scholarship, no critical knowledge of the history of painting, and no settled standards. A student would show his fellows some French illustrated paper that we might all admire, now some statue by Rodin or Dalou and now some declamatory Parisian monument, and if I did not happen to have discussed the matter with my father I would admire with no more discrimination than the rest. That pretentious monument to Gambetta made a great stir among us. No influence touched us but that of France, where one or two of the older students had been already and all hoped to go. Of England I alone knew anything. Our ablest student had learnt Italian to read Dante, but had never heard of Tennyson or Browning, and it was I who carried into the school some knowledge of English poetry, especially of Browning who had begun to move me by his air of wisdom. I do not believe that I worked well, for I

wrote a great deal and that tired me, and the work I was set to bored me. When alone and uninfluenced, I longed for pattern, for pre-Raphaelitism, for an art allied to poetry, and returned again and again to our National Gallery to gaze at Turner's Golden Bough. Yet I was too timid, had I known how, to break away from my father's style and the style of those about me. I was always hoping that my father would return to the style of his youth, and make pictures out of certain designs now lost, that one could still find in his portfolios. There was one of an old hunchback in vague medieval dress, going through some underground place where there are beds with people in the beds; a girl half rising from one has seized his hand and is kissing it. I have forgotten its story, but the strange old man and the intensity in the girl's figure are vivid as in my childhood. There is some passage, I believe in the Bible, about a man who saved a city and went away and was never heard of again and here he was in another design, an old ragged beggar in the market-place laughing at his own statue. But my father would say: "I must paint what I see in front of me. Of course I shall really paint something different because my nature will come in unconsciously." Sometimes I would try to argue with him, for I had come to think the philosophy of his fellow-artists and himself a misunderstanding created by Victorian science, and science I had grown to hate with a monkish hate; but no good came of it, and in a moment I would unsay what I had said and pretend that I did not really believe it. My father was painting many fine portraits, Dublin leaders of the bar, college notabilities, or chance comers whom he would paint for nothing if he liked their heads; but all displeased me. In my heart I thought that only beautiful things should be painted, and that only ancient things and the stuff of dreams were beautiful. And I almost quarrelled with my father when he made a large water-colour, one of his finest pictures and now lost, of a consumptive beggar girl. And a picture at

the Hibernian Academy of cocottes with yellow faces sitting before a café by some follower of Manet's made me miserable for days, but I was happy when partly through my father's planning some Whistlers were brought over and exhibited, and did not agree when my father said: "imagine making your old mother an arrangement in gray!" I did not care for mere reality and believed that creation should be conscious, and yet I could only imitate my father. I could not compose anything but a portrait and even to-day I constantly see people as a portrait painter, posing them in the mind's eye before such and such a background. Meanwhile I was still very much of a child, sometimes drawing with an elaborate frenzy, simulating what I believed of inspiration and sometimes walking with an artificial stride in memory of Hamlet and stopping at shop windows to look at my tie gathered into a loose sailor-knot and to regret that it could not be always blown out by the wind like Byron's tie in the picture. I had as many ideas as I have now, only I did not know how to choose from among them those that belonged to my life.

XXIII

We lived in a villa where the red bricks were made pretentious and vulgar with streaks of slate colour, and there seemed to be enemies everywhere. At one side indeed there was a friendly architect, but on the other some stupid stout woman and her family. I had a study with a window opposite some window of hers, & one night when I was writing I heard voices full of derision and saw the stout woman and her family standing in the window. I have a way of acting what I write and speaking it aloud without knowing what I am doing. Perhaps I was on my hands and knees, or looking down over the back of a chair talking into what I imagined an abyss. Another day a woman asked me to direct her on her way and while I was hesitating, being so suddenly called out of my thought, a woman from some neighbouring house came by. She said I was a poet and my questioner turned away contemptuously. Upon the other hand, the policeman and tramway conductor thought my absence of mind sufficiently explained when our servant told them I was a poet. “Oh well,” said the policeman, who had been asking why I went indifferently through clean and muddy places, “if it is only the poetry that is working in his head!” I imagine I looked gaunt and emaciated, for the little boys at the neighbouring cross-road used to say when I passed by: “Oh, here is King Death again.” One morning when my father was on the way to his studio, he met his landlord who had a big grocer’s shop and they had this conversation: “will you tell me, sir, if you think Tennyson should have been given that peerage?” “one’s only doubt is if he should have accepted it: it was a finer thing to be Alfred Tennyson.” There was a silence, and then: “well, all the people I know think he should not have got it.” Then, spitefully: “what’s the good of poetry?” “Oh, it gives our minds a great deal of pleasure.” “But wouldn’t it have given your mind more pleasure if he had written an improving book?” “Oh,

in that case I should not have read it." My father returned in the evening delighted with his story, but I could not understand how he could take such opinions lightly and not have seriously argued with the man. None of these people had ever seen any poet but an old white-haired man who had written volumes of easy, too-honied verse, and run through his money and gone clean out of his mind. He was a common figure in the streets and lived in some shabby neighbourhood of tenement houses where there were hens and chickens among the cobble stones. Every morning he carried home a loaf and gave half of it to the hens and chickens, the birds, or to some dog or starving cat. He was known to live in one room with a nail in the middle of the ceiling from which innumerable cords were stretched to other nails in the walls. In this way he kept up the illusion that he was living under canvas in some Arabian desert. I could not escape like this old man from house and neighbourhood, but hated both, hearing every whisper, noticing every passing glance. When my grandfather came for a few days to see a doctor, I was shocked to see him in our house. My father read out to him in the evening Clark Russell's "Wreck of the Grosvenor;" but the doctor forbade it, for my grandfather got up in the middle of the night and acted through the mutiny, as I acted my verse, saying the while, "yes, yes, that is the way it would all happen."

XXIV

From our first arrival in Dublin, my father had brought me from time to time to see Edward Dowden. He and my father had been college friends and were trying, perhaps, to take up again their old friendship. Sometimes we were asked to breakfast, and afterwards my father would tell me to read out one of my poems. Dowden was wise in his encouragement, never overpraising and never unsympathetic, and he would sometimes lend me books. The orderly, prosperous house where all was in good taste, where poetry was rightly valued, made Dublin tolerable for a while, and for perhaps a couple of years he was an image of romance. My father would not share my enthusiasm and soon, I noticed, grew impatient at these meetings. He would sometimes say that he had wanted Dowden when they were young to give himself to creative art, and would talk of what he considered Dowden's failure in life. I know now that he was finding in his friend what he himself had been saved from by the conversation of the pre-Raphaelites. "He will not trust his nature," he would say, or "he is too much influenced by his inferiors," or he would praise "Renunciants," one of Dowden's poems, to prove what Dowden might have written. I was not influenced for I had imagined a past worthy of that dark, romantic face. I took literally his verses, touched here and there with Swinburnian rhetoric, and believed that he had loved, unhappily and illicitly; and when through the practice of my art I discovered that certain images about the love of woman were the properties of a school, I but changed my fancy and thought of him as very wise.

I was constantly troubled about philosophic questions. I would say to my fellow students at the Art school, "poetry and sculpture exist to keep our passions alive;" and somebody would say, "we would be much better without our passions." Or I would have a week's anxiety over the problem:

do the arts make us happier, or more sensitive and therefore more unhappy. And I would say to Hughes or Sheppard, “if I cannot be certain they make us happier I will never write again.” If I spoke of these things to Dowden he would put the question away with good-humoured irony: he seemed to condescend to everybody and everything and was now my sage. I was about to learn that if a man is to write lyric poetry he must be shaped by nature and art to some one out of half-a-dozen traditional poses, and be lover or saint, sage or sensualist, or mere mocker of all life; and that none but that stroke of luckless luck can open before him the accumulated expression of the world. And this thought before it could be knowledge was an instinct.

I was vexed when my father called Dowden’s irony timidity, but after many years his impression has not changed for he wrote to me but a few months ago, “it was like talking to a priest. One had to be careful not to remind him of his sacrifice.” Once after breakfast Dowden read us some chapters of the unpublished “Life of Shelley,” and I who had made the “Prometheus Unbound” my sacred book was delighted with all he read. I was chilled, however, when he explained that he had lost his liking for Shelley and would not have written it but for an old promise to the Shelley family. When it was published, Matthew Arnold made sport of certain conventionalities and extravagances that were, my father and I had come to see, the violence or clumsiness of a conscientious man hiding from himself a lack of sympathy. He had abandoned too, or was about to abandon, what was to have been his master-work, “The Life of Goethe,” though in his youth a lecture course at Alexandra College that spoke too openly of Goethe’s loves had brought upon him the displeasure of our Protestant Archbishop of Dublin. Only Wordsworth, he said, kept, more than all, his early love.

Though my faith was shaken, it was only when he urged me to read George Eliot that I became angry and disillusioned & worked myself into a quarrel or half-quarrel. I had read all Victor Hugo's romances and a couple of Balzac's and was in no mind to like her. She seemed to have a distrust or a distaste for all in life that gives one a springing foot. Then too she knew so well how to enforce her distaste by the authority of her mid-Victorian science or by some habit of mind of its breeding, that I, who had not escaped the fascination of what I loathed, doubted while the book lay open whatsoever my instinct knew of splendour. She disturbed me and alarmed me, but when I spoke of her to my father, he threw her aside with a phrase, "Oh, she was an ugly woman who hated handsome men and handsome women;" and he began to praise "Wuthering Heights."

Only the other day, when I got Dowden's letters, did I discover for how many years the friendship between Dowden and my father had been an antagonism. My father had written from Fitzroy Road in the sixties that the brotherhood, by which he meant the poet Edwin Ellis, Nettleship and himself, "abhorred Wordsworth;" and Dowden, not remembering that another week would bring a different mood and abhorrence, had written a pained and solemn letter. My father had answered that Dowden believed too much in the intellect and that all valuable education was but a stirring up of the emotions and had added that this did not mean excitability. "In the completely emotional man," he wrote, "the least awakening of feeling is a harmony in which every chord of every feeling vibrates. Excitement is the feature of an insufficiently emotional nature, the harsh vibrating discourse of but one or two chords." Living in a free world accustomed to the gay exaggeration of the talk of equals, of men who talk and write to discover truth and not for popular instruction, he had already, when both men were in their twenties, decided it is plain that Dowden was a Provincial.

XXV

It was only when I began to study psychical research and mystical philosophy that I broke away from my father's influence. He had been a follower of John Stuart Mill and had grown to manhood with the scientific movement. In this he had never been of Rossetti's party who said that it mattered to nobody whether the sun went round the earth or the earth round the sun. But through this new research, this reaction from popular science, I had begun to feel that I had allies for my secret thought. Once when I was in Dowden's drawing-room a servant announced my late head-master. I must have got pale or red, for Dowden, with some ironical, friendly remark, brought me into another room and there I stayed until the visitor was gone. A few months later, when I met the head-master again I had more courage. We chanced upon one another in the street and he said, "I want you to use your influence with so-and-so, for he is giving all his time to some sort of mysticism and he will fail in his examination." I was in great alarm, but I managed to say something about the children of this world being wiser than the children of light. He went off with a brusque "good morning." I do not think that even at that age I would have been so grandiloquent but for my alarm. He had, however, aroused all my indignation.

My new allies and my old had alike sustained me. "Intermediate examinations," which I had always refused, meant money for pupil and for teacher, and that alone. My father had brought me up never when at school to think of the future or of any practical result. I have even known him to say, "when I was young, the definition of a gentleman was a man not wholly occupied in getting on." And yet this master wanted to withdraw my friend from the pursuit of the most important of all the truths. My friend, now in his last year at school, was a show boy, and had beaten all Ireland again and again, but now he and I were reading Baron Reichenbach on Odic

Force and manuals published by the Theosophical Society. We spent a good deal of time in the Kildare Street Museum passing our hands over the glass cases, feeling or believing we felt the Odic Force flowing from the big crystals. We also found pins blindfolded and read papers on our discoveries to the Hermetic Society that met near the roof in York Street. I had, when we first made our society, proposed for our consideration that whatever the great poets had affirmed in their finest moments was the nearest we could come to an authoritative religion, and that their mythology, their spirits of water and wind were but literal truth. I had read "Prometheus Unbound" with this thought in mind and wanted help to carry my study through all literature. I was soon to vex my father by defining truth as "the dramatically appropriate utterance of the highest man." And if I had been asked to define the "highest" man, I would have said perhaps, "we can but find him as Homer found Odysseus when he was looking for a theme."

My friend had written to some missionary society to send him to the South Seas, when I offered him Renan's "Life of Christ" and a copy of "Esoteric Buddhism." He refused both, but a few days later while reading for an examination in Kildare Street Library, he asked in an idle moment for "Esoteric Buddhism" and came out an esoteric Buddhist. He wrote to the missionaries withdrawing his letter and offered himself to the Theosophical Society as a *chela*. He was vexed now at my lack of zeal, for I had stayed somewhere between the books, held there perhaps by my father's scepticism. I said, and he thought it was a great joke though I was serious, that even if I were certain in my own mind, I did not know "a single person with a talent for conviction." For a time he made me ashamed of my world and its lack of zeal, and I wondered if his world (his father was a notorious Orange leader) where everything was a matter of belief was not better than mine. He himself proposed the immediate conversion of the other show

boy, a clever little fellow, now a Dublin mathematician and still under five feet. I found him a day later in much depression. I said, “did he refuse to listen to you?” “Not at all,” was the answer, “for I had only been talking for a quarter of an hour when he said he believed.” Certainly those minds, parched by many examinations, were thirsty.

Sometimes a professor of Oriental Languages at Trinity College, a Persian, came to our Society and talked of the magicians of the East. When he was a little boy, he had seen a vision in a pool of ink, a multitude of spirits singing in Arabic, “woe unto those that do not believe in us.” And we persuaded a Brahmin philosopher to come from London and stay for a few days with the only one among us who had rooms of his own. It was my first meeting with a philosophy that confirmed my vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless. Consciousness, he taught, does not merely spread out its surface but has, in vision and in contemplation, another motion and can change in height and in depth. A handsome young man with the typical face of Christ, he chaffed me good-humouredly because he said I came at breakfast and began some question that was interrupted by the first caller, waited in silence till ten or eleven at night when the last caller had gone, and finished my question.

XXVI

I thought a great deal about the system of education from which I had suffered, and believing that everybody had a philosophical defence for all they did, I desired greatly to meet some school-master that I might question him. For a moment it seemed as if I should have my desire. I had been invited to read out a poem called “The Island of Statues,” an arcadian play in imitation of Edmund Spenser, to a gathering of critics who were to decide whether it was worthy of publication in the College magazine. The magazine had already published a lyric of mine, the first ever printed, and people began to know my name. We met in the rooms of Mr. C. H. Oldham, now professor of Political Economy at our new University; and though Professor Bury, then a very young man, was to be the deciding voice, Mr. Oldham had asked quite a large audience. When the reading was over and the poem had been approved I was left alone, why I cannot remember, with a young man who was, I had been told, a school-master. I was silent, gathering my courage, and he also was silent; and presently I said without anything to lead up to it, “I know you will defend the ordinary system of education by saying that it strengthens the will, but I am convinced that it only seems to do so because it weakens the impulses.” Then I stopped, overtaken by shyness. He made no answer but smiled and looked surprised as though I had said, “you will say they are Persian attire; but let them be changed.”

XXVII

I had begun to frequent a club founded by Mr. Oldham, and not from natural liking, but from a secret ambition. I wished to become self-possessed, to be able to play with hostile minds as Hamlet played, to look in the lion's face, as it were, with unquivering eyelash. In Ireland harsh argument which had gone out of fashion in England was still the manner of our conversation, and at this club Unionist and Nationalist could interrupt one another and insult one another without the formal and traditional restraint of public speech. Sometimes they would change the subject & discuss Socialism, or a philosophical question, merely to discover their old passions under a new shape. I spoke easily and I thought well till some one was rude and then I would become silent or exaggerate my opinion to absurdity, or hesitate and grow confused, or be carried away myself by some party passion. I would spend hours afterwards going over my words and putting the wrong ones right. Discovering that I was only self-possessed with people I knew intimately, I would often go to a strange house where I knew I would spend a wretched hour for schooling sake. I did not discover that Hamlet had his self-possession from no schooling but from indifference and passion conquering sweetness, and that less heroic minds can but hope it from old age.

XXVIII

I had very little money and one day the toll-taker at the metal bridge over the Liffey and a gossip of his laughed when I refused the halfpenny and said "no, I will go round by O'Connell Bridge." When I called for the first time at a house in Leinster Road several middle-aged women were playing cards and suggested my taking a hand and gave me a glass of sherry. The sherry went to my head and I was impoverished for days by the loss of sixpence. My hostess was Ellen O'Leary, who kept house for her brother John O'Leary the Fenian, the handsomest old man I had ever seen. He had been condemned to twenty years penal servitude but had been set free after five on condition that he did not return to Ireland for fifteen years. He had said to the government, "I will not return if Germany makes war on you, but I will return if France does." He and his old sister lived exactly opposite the Orange leader for whom he had a great respect. His sister stirred my affection at first for no better reason than her likeness of face and figure to the matron of my London school, a friendly person, but when I came to know her I found sister and brother alike were of Plutarch's people. She told me of her brother's life, how in his youth as now in his age, he would spend his afternoons searching for rare books among second-hand book-shops, how the Fenian organizer James Stephens had found him there and asked for his help. "I do not think you have any chance of success," he had said, "but if you never ask me to enroll anybody else I will join, it will be very good for the morals of the country." She told me how it grew to be a formidable movement, and of the arrests that followed (I believe that her own sweetheart had somehow fallen among the wreckage,) of sentences of death pronounced upon false evidence amid a public panic, and told it all without bitterness. No fanaticism could thrive amid such gentleness. She

never found it hard to believe that an opponent had as high a motive as her own and needed upon her difficult road no spur of hate.

Her brother seemed very unlike on a first hearing for he had some violent oaths, “Good God in Heaven” being one of them; and if he disliked anything one said or did, he spoke all his thought, but in a little one heard his justice match her charity. “Never has there been a cause so bad,” he would say, “that it has not been defended by good men for good reasons.” Nor would he overvalue any man because they shared opinions; and when he lent me the poems of Davis and the Young Irelanders, of whom I had known nothing, he did not, although the poems of Davis had made him a patriot, claim that they were very good poetry.

His room was full of books, always second-hand copies that had often been ugly and badly printed when new and had not grown to my unhistoric mind more pleasing from the dirt of some old Dublin book-shop. Great numbers were Irish, and for the first time I began to read histories and verses that a Catholic Irishman knows from boyhood. He seemed to consider politics almost wholly as a moral discipline, and seldom said of any proposed course of action that it was practical or otherwise. When he spoke to me of his prison life he spoke of all with seeming freedom, but presently one noticed that he never spoke of hardship and if one asked him why, he would say, “I was in the hands of my enemies, why should I complain?” I have heard since that the governor of his jail found out that he had endured some unnecessary discomfort for months and had asked why he did not speak of it. “I did not come here to complain,” was the answer. He had the moral genius that moves all young people and moves them the more if they are repelled by those who have strict opinions and yet have lived commonplace lives. I had begun, as would any other of my training, to say violent and paradoxical things to shock provincial sobriety, and

Dowden's ironical calm had come to seem but a professional pose. But here was something as spontaneous as the life of an artist. Sometimes he would say things that would have sounded well in some heroic Elizabethan play. It became my delight to rouse him to these outbursts for I was the poet in the presence of his theme. Once when I was defending an Irish politician who had made a great outcry because he was treated as a common felon, by showing that he did it for the cause's sake, he said, "there are things that a man must not do even to save a nation." He would speak a sentence like that in ignorance of its passionate value, and would forget it the moment after.

I met at his house friends of later life, Katharine Tynan who still lived upon her father's farm, and Dr. Hyde, still a college student who took snuff like those Mayo county people, whose stories and songs he was writing down. "Davitt wants followers by the thousand," O'Leary would say, "I only want half-a-dozen." One constant caller looked at me with much hostility, John F. Taylor, an obscure great orator. The other day in Dublin I overheard a man murmuring to another one of his speeches as I might some Elizabethan lyric that is in my very bones. It was delivered at some Dublin debate, some College society perhaps. The Lord Chancellor had spoken with balanced unemotional sentences now self-complacent, now in derision. Taylor began hesitating and stopping for words, but after speaking very badly for a little, straightened his figure and spoke as out of a dream: "I am carried to another age, a nobler court, and another Lord Chancellor is speaking. I am at the court of the first Pharaoh." Thereupon he put into the mouth of that Egyptian all his audience had listened to, but now it was spoken to the children of Israel. "If you have any spirituality as you boast, why not use our great empire to spread it through the world, why still cling to that beggarly nationality of yours? what are its history and its works

weighed with those of Egypt." Then his voice changed and sank: "I see a man at the edge of the crowd; he is standing listening there, but he will not obey;" and then with his voice rising to a cry, "had he obeyed he would never have come down the mountain carrying in his arms the tables of the Law in the language of the outlaw."

He had been in a linen-draper's shop for a while, had educated himself and put himself to college, and was now, as a lawyer, famous for hopeless cases where unsure judgment could not make things worse, and eloquence, power of cross-examination and learning might amend all. Conversation with him was always argument, and for an obstinate opponent he had such phrases as, "have you your head in a bag, sir?" and I seemed his particular aversion. As with many of the self-made men of that generation, Carlyle was his chief literary enthusiasm, supporting him, as he believed, in his contempt for the complexities and refinements he had not found in his hard life, and I belonged to a generation that had begun to call Carlyle rhetorician and demagogue. I had once seen what I had believed to be an enraged bull in a field and had walked up to it as a test of courage to discover, just as panic fell upon me, that it was merely an irritable cow. I braved Taylor again and again, but always found him worse than my expectation. I would say, quoting Mill, "oratory is heard, poetry is overheard." And he would answer, his voice full of contempt, that there was always an audience; and yet, in his moments of lofty speech, he himself was alone no matter what the crowd.

At other times his science or his Catholic orthodoxy, I never could discover which, would become enraged with my supernaturalism. I can but once remember escaping him unabashed and unconquered. I said with deliberate exaggeration at some evening party at O'Leary's "five out of every six people have seen a ghost;" and Taylor fell into my net with "well,

I will ask everybody here." I managed that the first answer should come from a man who had heard a voice he believed to be that of his dead brother, and the second from a doctor's wife who had lived in a haunted house and met a man with his throat cut, whose throat as he drifted along the garden-walk "had opened and closed like the mouth of a fish." Taylor threw up his head like an angry horse, but asked no further question, and did not return to the subject that evening. If he had gone on he would have heard from everybody some like story though not all at first hand, and Miss O'Leary would have told him what happened at the death of one of the MacManus brothers, well known in the politics of Young Ireland. One brother was watching by the bed where the other lay dying and saw a strange hawk-like bird fly through the open window and alight upon the breast of the dying man. He did not dare to drive it away and it remained there, as it seemed, looking into his brother's eyes until death came, and then it flew out of the window. I think, though I am not sure, that she had the story from the watcher himself.

It was understood that Taylor's temper kept him from public life, though he may have been the greatest orator of his time, partly because no leader would accept him, and still more because, in the words of one of his Dublin enemies, "he had never joined any party and as soon as one joined him he seceded." With O'Leary he was always, even when they differed, as they often did, gentle and deferential, but once only, and that was years afterwards, did I think that he was about to include me among his friends. We met by chance in a London street and he stopped me with an abrupt movement: "Yeats," he said, "I have been thinking. If you and ... (naming another aversion,) were born in a small Italian principality in the Middle Ages, he would have friends at court and you would be in exile with a price on your head." He went off without another word, and the next time we met

he was no less offensive than before. He, imprisoned in himself, and not the always unperturbed O'Leary, comes before me as the tragic figure of my youth. The same passion for all moral and physical splendour that drew him to O'Leary would make him beg leave to wear, for some few days, a friend's ring or pin, and gave him a heart that every pretty woman set on fire. I doubt if he was happy in his loves; for those his powerful intellect had fascinated were, I believe, repelled by his coarse red hair, his gaunt ungainly body, his stiff movements as of a Dutch doll, his badly rolled, shabby umbrella. And yet with women, as with O'Leary, he was gentle, deferential, almost diffident.

A Young Ireland Society met in the lecture hall of a workman's club in York Street with O'Leary for president, and there four or five university students and myself and occasionally Taylor spoke on Irish history or literature. When Taylor spoke, it was a great event, and his delivery in the course of a speech or lecture of some political verse by Thomas Davis gave me a conviction of how great might be the effect of verse spoken by a man almost rhythm-drunk at some moment of intensity, the apex of long mounting thought. Verses that seemed when one saw them upon the page flat and empty caught from that voice, whose beauty was half in its harsh strangeness, nobility and style. My father had always read verse with an equal intensity and a greater subtlety, but this art was public and his private, and it is Taylor's voice that rings in my ears and awakens my longing when I have heard some player speak lines, "so naturally," as a famous player said to me, "that nobody can find out that it is verse at all." I made a good many speeches, more I believe as a training for self-possession than from desire of speech.

Once our debates roused a passion that came to the newspapers and the streets. There was an excitable man who had fought for the Pope against the

Italian patriots and who always rode a white horse in our Nationalist processions. He got on badly with O'Leary who had told him that "attempting to oppress others was a poor preparation for liberating your own country." O'Leary had written some letter to the press condemning the "Irish-American Dynamite Party" as it was called, and defining the limits of "honourable warfare." At the next meeting, the papal soldier rose in the middle of the discussion on some other matter and moved a vote of censure on O'Leary. "I myself" he said "do not approve of bombs, but I do not think that any Irishman should be discouraged." O'Leary ruled him out of order. He refused to obey and remained standing. Those round him began to threaten. He swung the chair he had been sitting on round his head and defied everybody. However he was seized from all sides and thrown out, and a special meeting called to expel him. He wrote letters to the papers and addressed a crowd somewhere. "No Young Ireland Society," he protested, "could expel a man whose grandfather had been hanged in 1798." When the night of the special meeting came his expulsion was moved, but before the vote could be taken an excited man announced that there was a crowd in the street, that the papal soldier was making a speech, that in a moment we should be attacked. Three or four of us ran and put our backs to the door while others carried on the debate. It was an inner door with narrow glass windows at each side and through these we could see the street-door and the crowd in the street. Presently a man asked us through the crack in the door if we would as a favour "leave the crowd to the workman's club upstairs." In a couple of minutes there was a great noise of sticks and broken glass, and after that our landlord came to find out who was to pay for the hall-lamp.

XXIX

From these debates, from O'Leary's conversation, and from the Irish books he lent or gave me has come all I have set my hand to since. I had begun to know a great deal about the Irish poets who had written in English. I read with excitement books I should find unreadable to-day, and found romance in lives that had neither wit nor adventure. I did not deceive myself, I knew how often they wrote a cold and abstract language, and yet I who had never wanted to see the houses where Keats and Shelley lived would ask everybody what sort of place Inchedony was, because Callanan had named after it a bad poem in the manner of "Childe Harold." Walking home from a debate, I remember saying to some college student "Ireland cannot put from her the habits learned from her old military civilization and from a church that prays in Latin. Those popular poets have not touched her heart, her poetry when it comes will be distinguished and lonely." O'Leary had once said to me, "neither Ireland nor England knows the good from the bad in any art, but Ireland unlike England does not hate the good when it is pointed out to her." I began to plot and scheme how one might seal with the right image the soft wax before it began to harden. I had noticed that Irish Catholics among whom had been born so many political martyrs had not the good taste, the household courtesy and decency of the Protestant Ireland I had known, and yet Protestant Ireland had begun to think of nothing but getting on. I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, an European pose. It was because of this dream when we returned to London that I made with pastels upon the ceiling of my study a map of Sligo decorated like some old map with a ship and an elaborate compass and wrote, a little against the grain, a couple of Sligo stories, one a vague echo of "Grettir the Strong," which my

father had read to me in childhood, and finished with better heart my "Wanderings of Oisin," and began after ridding my style of romantic colour "The Countess Cathleen." I saw that our people did not read, but that they listened patiently (how many long political speeches have they listened to?) and saw that there must be a theatre, and if I could find the right musicians, words set to music. I foresaw a great deal that we are doing now, though never the appetite of our new middle-class for "realism," nor the greatness of the opposition, nor the slowness of the victory. Davis had done so much in the four years of his working life, I had thought all needful pamphleteering and speech-making could be run through at the day's end, not knowing that taste is so much more deeply rooted than opinion that even if one had school and newspaper to help, one could scarcely stir it under two generations. Then too, bred up in a studio where all things are discussed and where I had even been told that indiscretion and energy are inseparable, I knew nothing of the conservatism or of the suspicions of piety. I had planned a drama like that of Greece, and romances that were, it may be, half Hugo and half de la Motte Fouqué, to bring into the town the memories and visions of the country and to spread everywhere the history and legends of mediaeval Ireland and to fill Ireland once more with sacred places. I even planned out, and in some detail, (for those mysterious lights and voices were never long forgotten,) another Samothrace, a new Eleusis. I believed, so great was my faith, or so deceptive the precedent of Young Ireland, that I should find men of genius everywhere. I had not the conviction, as it may seem, that a people can be compelled to write what one pleases, for that could but end in rhetoric or in some educational movement but believed I had divined the soul of the people and had set my shoes upon a road that would be crowded presently.

XXX

Someone at the Young Ireland Society gave me a newspaper that I might read some article or letter. I began idly reading verses describing the shore of Ireland as seen by a returning, dying emigrant. My eyes filled with tears and yet I knew the verses were badly written — vague, abstract words such as one finds in a newspaper. I looked at the end and saw the name of some political exile who had died but a few days after his return to Ireland. They had moved me because they contained the actual thoughts of a man at a passionate moment of life, and when I met my father I was full of the discovery. We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend. We should not disguise them in any way; for our lives give them force as the lives of people in plays give force to their words. Personal utterance, which had almost ceased in English literature, could be as fine an escape from rhetoric and abstraction as drama itself. My father was indignant, almost violent, and would hear of nothing but drama. “Personal utterance was only egotism.” I knew it was not, but as yet did not know how to explain the difference. I tried from that on to write out of my emotions exactly as they came to me in life, not changing them to make them more beautiful, and to rid my syntax of all inversions and my vocabulary of literary words, and that made it hard to write at all. It meant rejecting the words or the constructions that had been used over and over because they flow most easily into rhyme and measure. Then, too, how hard it was to be sincere, not to make the emotion more beautiful and more violent or the circumstance more romantic. “If I can be sincere and make my language natural, and without becoming discursive, like a novelist, and so indiscreet and prosaic,” I said to myself, “I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet; for it will be no longer a matter of literature

at all.” Yet when I re-read those early poems which gave me so much trouble, I find little but romantic convention, unconscious drama. It is so many years before one can believe enough in what one feels even to know what the feeling is.

XXXI

Perhaps a year before we returned to London, a Catholic friend brought me to a spiritualistic seance at the house of a young man who had been lately arrested under a suspicion of Fenianism, but had been released for lack of evidence. He and his friends had been sitting weekly about a table in the hope of spiritual manifestation and one had developed mediumship. A drawer full of books had leaped out of the table when no one was touching it, a picture had moved upon the wall. There were some half dozen of us, and our host began by making passes until the medium fell asleep sitting upright in his chair. Then the lights were turned out, and we sat waiting in the dim light of a fire. Presently my shoulders began to twitch and my hands. I could easily have stopped them, but I had never heard of such a thing and I was curious. After a few minutes the movement became violent and I stopped it. I sat motionless for a while and then my whole body moved like a suddenly unrolled watch-spring, and I was thrown backward on the wall. I again stilled the movement and sat at the table. Everybody began to say I was a medium, and that if I would not resist some wonderful thing would happen. I remembered that my father had told me that Balzac had once desired to take opium for the experience sake, but would not because he dreaded the surrender of his will. We were now holding each other's hands and presently my right hand banged the knuckles of the woman next to me upon the table. She laughed, and the medium, speaking for the first time, and with difficulty, out of his mesmeric sleep, said, "tell her there is great danger." He stood up and began walking round me, making movements with his hands as though he were pushing something away. I was now struggling vainly with this force which compelled me to movements I had not willed, and my movements had become so violent that

the table was broken. I tried to pray, and because I could not remember a prayer, repeated in a loud voice

Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woe...
Sing, heavenly muse.

My Catholic friend had left the table and was saying a Pater Noster and Ave Maria in the corner. Presently all became still and so dark that I could not see anybody. I described it to somebody next day as like going out of a noisy political meeting on to a quiet country road. I said to myself, "I am now in a trance but I no longer have any desire to resist." But when I turned my eyes to the fireplace I could see a faint gleam of light, so I thought "no, I am not in a trance." Then I saw shapes faintly appearing in the darkness & thought, "they are spirits;" but they were only the spiritualists and my friend at her prayers. The medium said in a faint voice, "we are through the bad spirits." I said, "will they ever come again, do you think?" and he said, "no, never again, I think," and in my boyish vanity I thought it was I who had banished them. For years afterwards I would not go to a seance or turn a table and would often ask myself what was that violent impulse that had run through my nerves? was it a part of myself — something always to be a danger perhaps; or had it come from without, as it seemed?

XXXII

I had published my first book of poems by subscription, O'Leary finding many subscribers, and a book of stories, when I heard that my grandmother was dead and went to Sligo for the funeral. She had asked to see me but by some mistake I was not sent for. She had heard that I was much about with a beautiful, admired woman and feared that I did not speak of marriage because I was poor, and wanted to say to me "women care nothing about money." My grandfather was dying also and only survived her a few weeks. I went to see him and wondered at his handsome face now sickness had refined it, and noticed that he foretold the changes in the weather by indications of the light and of the temperature that could not have told me anything. As I sat there my old childish fear returned and I was glad to get away. I stayed with my uncle whose house was opposite where my grandfather lived, and walking home with him one day we met the doctor. The doctor said there was no hope and that my grandfather should be told, but my uncle would not allow it. He said "it would make a man mad to know he was dying." In vain the doctor pleaded that he had never known a man not made calmer by the knowledge. I listened sad and angry, but my uncle always took a low view of human nature, his very tolerance which was exceedingly great came from his hoping nothing of anybody. Before he had given way my grandfather lifted up his arms and cried out "there she is," and fell backward dead. Before he was dead, old servants of that house where there had never been noise or disorder began their small pilferings, and after his death there was a quarrel over the disposition of certain mantle-piece ornaments of no value.

XXXIII

For some months now I have lived with my own youth and childhood, not always writing indeed but thinking of it almost every day, and I am sorrowful and disturbed. It is not that I have accomplished too few of my plans, for I am not ambitious; but when I think of all the books I have read, and of the wise words I have heard spoken, and of the anxiety I have given to parents and grandparents, and of the hopes that I have had, all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens.

The Trembling of the Veil

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BOOK I: FOUR YEARS — 1887-1891

I

At the end of the ‘eighties my father and mother, my brother and sisters and myself, all newly arrived from Dublin, were settled in Bedford Park in a red-brick house with several mantelpieces of wood, copied from marble mantelpieces designed by the brothers Adam, a balcony and a little garden shadowed by a great horse-chestnut tree. Years before we had lived there, when the crooked ostentatiously picturesque streets with great trees casting great shadows had been a new enthusiasm: the Pre-Raphaelite movement at last affecting life. But now exaggerated criticism had taken the place of enthusiasm, the tiled roofs, the first in modern London, were said to leak, which they did not, and the drains to be bad, though that was no longer true; and I imagine that houses were cheap. I remember feeling disappointed because the co-operative stores, with their little seventeenth century panes, had lost the romance they had when I had passed them still unfinished on my way to school; and because the public house, called The Tabard after Chaucer’s Inn, was so plainly a common public house; and because the great sign of a trumpeter designed by Rooke, the Pre-Raphaelite artist, had been freshened by some inferior hand. The big red-brick church had never pleased me, and I was accustomed, when I saw the wooden balustrade that ran along the slanting edge of the roof where nobody ever walked or could walk, to remember the opinion of some architect friend of my father’s, that it had been put there to keep the birds from falling off. Still, however, it had some village characters and helped us to feel not wholly lost in the metropolis. I no longer went to church as a regular habit, but go I sometimes did, for one Sunday morning I saw these words painted on a board in the porch: “The congregation are requested to kneel during

prayers; the kneelers are afterwards to be hung upon pegs provided for the purpose." In front of every seat hung a little cushion and these cushions were called "kneelers." Presently the joke ran through the community, where there were many artists who considered religion at best an unimportant accessory to good architecture and who disliked that particular church.

II

I could not understand where the charm had gone that I had felt, when as a school-boy of twelve or thirteen I had played among the unfinished houses, once leaving the marks of my two hands, blacked by a fall among some paint, upon a white balustrade. Sometimes I thought it was because these were real houses, while my play had been among toy-houses some day to be inhabited by imaginary people full of the happiness that one can see in picture books.

I was in all things Pre-Raphaelite. When I was fifteen or sixteen my father had told me about Rossetti and Blake and given me their poetry to read; and once at Liverpool on my way to Sligo I had seen Dante's Dream in the gallery there, a picture painted when Rossetti had lost his dramatic power and to-day not very pleasing to me, and its colour, its people, its romantic architecture had blotted all other pictures away. It was a perpetual bewilderment that my father, who had begun life as a Pre-Raphaelite painter, now painted portraits of the first comer, children selling newspapers, or a consumptive girl with a basket of fish upon her head, and that when, moved perhaps by some memory of his youth, he chose some theme from poetic tradition, he would soon weary and leave it unfinished. I had seen the change coming bit by bit and its defence elaborated by young

men fresh from the Paris art-schools. “We must paint what is in front of us,” or “A man must be of his own time,” they would say, and if I spoke of Blake or Rossetti they would point out his bad drawing and tell me to admire Carolus Duran and Bastien-Lepage. Then, too, they were very ignorant men; they read nothing, for nothing mattered but “knowing how to paint,” being in reaction against a generation that seemed to have wasted its time upon so many things. I thought myself alone in hating these young men, now indeed getting towards middle life, their contempt for the past, their monopoly of the future, but in a few months I was to discover others of my own age, who thought as I did, for it is not true that youth looks before it with the mechanical gaze of a well-drilled soldier. Its quarrel is not with the past, but with the present, where its elders are so obviously powerful and no cause seems lost if it seem to threaten that power. Does cultivated youth ever really love the future, where the eye can discover no persecuted Royalty hidden among oak leaves, though from it certainly does come so much proletarian rhetoric?

I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church out of poetic tradition: a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians. I wished for a world, where I could discover this tradition perpetually, and not in pictures and in poems only, but in tiles round the chimney-piece and in the hangings that kept out the draught. I had even created a dogma: “Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the nearest I can go to truth.”

When I listened they seemed always to speak of one thing only: they, their loves, every incident of their lives, were steeped in the supernatural. Could even Titian's "Ariosto" that I loved beyond other portraits have its grave look, as if waiting for some perfect final event, if the painters before Titian had not learned portraiture, while painting into the corner of compositions full of saints and Madonnas, their kneeling patrons? At seventeen years old I was already an old-fashioned brass cannon full of shot, and nothing had kept me from going off but a doubt as to my capacity to shoot straight.

III

I was not an industrious student and knew only what I had found by accident and I found nothing I cared for after Titian, and Titian I knew from an imitation of his *Supper of Emmaus* in Dublin, till Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites; and among my father's friends were no Pre-Raphaelites. Some indeed had come to Bedford Park in the enthusiasm of the first building and others to be near those that had. There was Todhunter, a well-off man who had bought my father's pictures while my father was still Pre-Raphaelite; once a Dublin doctor he was now a poet and a writer of poetical plays; a tall, sallow, lank, melancholy man, a good scholar and a good intellect; and with him my father carried on a warm exasperated friendship, fed I think by old memories and wasted by quarrels over matters of opinion. Of all the survivors he was the most dejected and the least estranged, and I remember encouraging him, with a sense of worship shared, to buy a very expensive carpet designed by Morris. He displayed it without strong liking and would have agreed had there been any to find fault. If he had liked anything strongly he might have been a famous man, for a few years later he was to write, under some casual patriotic impulse, certain excellent verses now in

all Irish anthologies; but with him every book was a new planting, and not a new bud on an old bough. He had I think no peace in himself. But my father's chief friend was York Powell, a famous Oxford Professor of history, a broad-built, broad-headed, brown-bearded man clothed in heavy blue cloth and looking, but for his glasses and the dim sight of a student, like some captain in the merchant service. One often passed with pleasure from Todhunter's company to that of one who was almost ostentatiously at peace. He cared nothing for philosophy, nothing for economics, nothing for the policy of nations; for history, as he saw it, was a memory of men who were amusing or exciting to think about. He impressed all who met him, and seemed to some a man of genius, but he had not enough ambition to shape his thought, or conviction to give rhythm to his style and remained always a poor writer. I was too full of unfinished speculations and premature convictions to value rightly his conversation, informed by a vast erudition, which would give itself to every casual association of speech and company, precisely because he had neither cause nor design. My father, however, found Powell's concrete narrative manner in talk a necessary completion of his own, and when I asked him in a letter many years later where he got his philosophy replied "from York Powell" and thereon added, no doubt remembering that Powell was without ideas, "by looking at him." Then there was a good listener, a painter in whose hall hung a big picture painted in his student days of Ulysses sailing home from the Phaeacian court, an orange and a skin of wine at his side, blue mountains towering behind; but who lived by drawing domestic scenes and lovers' meetings for a weekly magazine that had an immense circulation among the imperfectly educated. To escape the boredom of work, which he never turned to but under pressure of necessity and usually late at night, with the publisher's messenger in the hall, he had half-filled his studio with mechanical toys, of

his own invention, and perpetually increased their number. A model railway train at intervals puffed its way along the walls, passing several railway stations and signal boxes; and on the floor lay a camp with attacking and defending soldiers and a fortification that blew up when the attackers fired a pea through a certain window; while a large model of a Thames barge hung from the ceiling. Opposite our house lived an old artist who worked also for the illustrated papers for a living, but painted landscapes for his pleasure, and of him I remember nothing except that he had outlived ambition, was a good listener, and that my father explained his gaunt appearance by his descent from Pocahontas. If all these men were a little like becalmed ships, there was certainly one man whose sails were full. Three or four doors off on our side of the road lived a decorative artist in all the naïve confidence of popular ideals and the public approval. He was our daily comedy. "I myself and Sir Frederick Leighton are the greatest decorative artists of the age," was among his sayings, and a great Lych-gate, bought from some country church-yard, reared its thatched roof, meant to shelter bearers and coffin, above the entrance to his front garden to show that he at any rate knew nothing of discouragement. In this fairly numerous company — there were others though no other face rises before me — my father and York Powell found listeners for a conversation that had no special loyalties, or antagonisms; while I could only talk upon set topics, being in the heat of my youth, and the topics that filled me with excitement were never spoken of.

IV

Bedford Park had a red brick clubhouse with a little theatre that began to stir my imagination. I persuaded Todhunter to write a pastoral play and

have it performed there.

A couple of years before, while we were still in Dublin, he had given at Hengler's Circus, remodelled as a Greek Theatre, a most expensive performance of his *Helena of Troas*, an oratorical Swinburnian play which I had thought as unactable as it was unreadable. Since I was seventeen I had constantly tested my own ambition with Keats's praise of him who "left great verses to a little clan," so it was but natural that I should spend an evening persuading him that we had nothing to do with the great public, that it should be a point of honour to be content with our own little public, that he should write of shepherds and shepherdesses because people would expect them to talk poetry and move without melodrama. He wrote his *Sicilian Idyll*, which I have not looked at for thirty years, and never rated very high as poetry, and had the one unmistakable success of his life. The little theatre was full for twice the number of performances intended, for artists, men of letters and students had come from all over London.

I made through these performances a close friend and a discovery that was to influence my life. Todhunter had engaged several professional actors with a little reputation, but had given the chief woman's part to Florence Farr, who had qualities no contemporary professional practice could have increased, the chief man's part to an amateur, Heron Allen, solicitor, fiddler and popular writer on palmistry. Heron Allen and Florence Farr read poetry for their pleasure. While they were upon the stage no one else could hold an eye or an ear. Their speech was music, the poetry acquired a nobility, a passionate austerity that made it seem akin for certain moments to the great poetry of the world. Heron Allen, who had never spoken in public before except to lecture upon the violin, had the wisdom to reduce his acting to a series of poses, to be the stately shepherd with not more gesture than was needed to "twitch his mantle blue" and to let his grace be foil to Florence

Farr's more impassioned delivery. When they closed their mouths, and some other player opened his, breaking up the verse to make it conversational, jerking his body or his arms that he might seem no austere poetical image but very man, I listened in raging hatred. I kept my seat with difficulty, I searched my memory for insulting phrases, I even muttered them to myself that the people about might hear. I had discovered for the first time that in the performance of all drama that depends for its effect upon beauty of language, poetical culture may be more important than professional experience.

Florence Farr lived in lodgings some twenty minutes' walk away at Brook Green, and I was soon a constant caller, talking over plays that I would some day write her. She had three great gifts, a tranquil beauty like that of Demeter's image near the British Museum reading room door, and an incomparable sense of rhythm and a beautiful voice, the seeming natural expression of the image. And yet there was scarce another gift that she did not value above those three. We all have our simplifying image, our genius, and such hard burden does it lay upon us that, but for the praise of others, we would deride it and hunt it away. She could only express hers through an unfashionable art, an art that has scarce existed since the seventeenth century, and so could only earn unimportant occasional praise. She would dress without care or calculation as if to hide her beauty and seem contemptuous of its power. If a man fell in love with her she would notice that she had seen just that movement upon the stage or had heard just that intonation and all seemed unreal. If she read out some poem in English or in French all was passion, all a traditional splendour, but she spoke of actual things with a cold wit or under the strain of paradox. Wit and paradox alike sought to pull down whatever had tradition or passion and she was soon to spend her days in the British Museum reading room and become erudite in

many heterogeneous studies moved by an insatiable, destroying curiosity. I formed with her an enduring friendship that was an enduring exasperation — "why do you play the part with a bent back and a squeak in the voice? How can you be a character actor, you who hate all our life, you who belong to a life that is a vision?" But argument was no use, and some Nurse in Euripedes must be played with all an old woman's infirmities and not as I would have it, with all a Sybil's majesty, because "it is no use doing what nobody wants," or because she would show that she "could do what the others did."

I used in my rage to compare her thoughts, when her worst mood was upon her, to a game called Spillikens which I had seen played in my childhood with little pieces of bone that you had to draw out with a hook from a bundle of like pieces. A bundle of bones instead of Demeter's golden sheaf! Her sitting room at the Brook Green lodging house was soon a reflection of her mind, the walls covered with musical instruments, pieces of oriental drapery, and Egyptian gods and goddesses painted by herself in the British Museum.

V

Presently a hansom drove up to our door at Bedford Park with Miss Maud Gonne, who brought an introduction to my father from old John O'Leary, the Fenian leader. She vexed my father by praise of war, war for its own sake, not as the creator of certain virtues but as if there were some virtue in excitement itself. I supported her against my father, which vexed him the more, though he might have understood that, apart from the fact that Carolus Duran and Bastien-Lepage were somehow involved, a man so young as I could not have differed from a woman so beautiful and so

young. To-day, with her great height and the unchangeable lineaments of her form, she looks the Sybil I would have had played by Florence Farr, but in that day she seemed a classical impersonation of the Spring, the Virgilian commendation “She walks like a goddess” made for her alone. Her complexion was luminous, like that of apple blossom through which the light falls, and I remember her standing that first day by a great heap of such blossoms in the window. In the next few years I saw her always when she passed to and fro between Dublin and Paris, surrounded, no matter how rapid her journey and how brief her stay at either end of it, by cages full of birds, canaries, finches of all kinds, dogs, a parrot, and once a full-grown hawk from Donegal. Once when I saw her to her railway carriage I noticed how the cages obstructed wraps and cushions and wondered what her fellow travellers would say, but the carriage remained empty. It was years before I could see into the mind that lay hidden under so much beauty and so much energy.

VI

Some quarter of an hour’s walk from Bedford Park, out on the high road to Richmond, lived W. E. Henley, and I, like many others, began under him my education. His portrait, a lithograph by Rothenstein, hangs over my mantelpiece among portraits of other friends. He is drawn standing, but because doubtless of his crippled legs he leans forward, resting his elbows upon some slightly suggested object — a table or a window-sill. His heavy figure and powerful head, the disordered hair standing upright, his short irregular beard and moustache, his lined and wrinkled face, his eyes steadily fixed upon some object, in complete confidence and self-possession, and yet as in half-broken reverie, all are there exactly as I remember him. I have

seen other portraits and they too show him exactly as I remember him, as though he had but one appearance and that seen fully at the first glance and by all alike. He was most human — human I used to say like one of Shakespeare's characters — and yet pressed and pummelled, as it were, into a single attitude, almost into a gesture and a speech as by some overwhelming situation. I disagreed with him about everything, but I admired him beyond words. With the exception of some early poems founded upon old French models I disliked his poetry, mainly because he wrote in *vers libre*, which I associated with Tyndall and Huxley, and Bastien-Lepage's clownish peasant staring with vacant eyes at her great boots; and filled it with unimpassioned description of an hospital ward where his leg had been amputated. I wanted the strongest passions, passions that had nothing to do with observation, sung in metrical forms that seemed old enough to be sung by men half-asleep or riding upon a journey. Furthermore, Pre-Raphaelism affected him as some people are affected by a cat in the room, and though he professed himself at our first meeting without political interests or convictions, he soon grew into a violent unionist and imperialist. I used to say when I spoke of his poems: "He is like a great actor with a bad part; yet who would look at Hamlet in the grave scene if Salvini played the grave-digger?" and I might so have explained much that he said and did. I meant that he was like a great actor of passion — character-acting meant nothing to me for many years — and an actor of passion will display some one quality of soul, personified again and again, just as a great poetical painter, Titian, Botticelli, Rossetti, may depend for his greatness upon a type of beauty which presently we call by his name. Irving, the last of the sort on the English stage, and in modern England and France it is the rarest sort, never moved me but in the expression of intellectual pride and though I saw Salvini but once I am

convinced that his genius was a kind of animal nobility. Henley, half inarticulate — "I am very costive," he would say — beset with personal quarrels, built up an image of power and magnanimity till it became, at moments, when seen as it were by lightning, his true self. Half his opinions were the contrivance of a sub-consciousness that sought always to bring life to the dramatic crisis and expression to that point of artifice where the true self could find its tongue. Without opponents there had been no drama, and in his youth Ruskinism and Pre-Raphaelitism, for he was of my father's generation, were the only possible opponents. How could one resent his prejudice when, that he himself might play a worthy part, he must find beyond the common rout, whom he derided and flouted daily, opponents he could imagine moulded like himself? Once he said to me in the height of his imperial propaganda, "Tell those young men in Ireland that this great thing must go on. They say Ireland is not fit for self-government, but that is nonsense. It is as fit as any other European country, but we cannot grant it." And then he spoke of his desire to found and edit a Dublin newspaper. It would have expounded the Gaelic propaganda then beginning, though Dr Hyde had, as yet, no league, our old stories, our modern literature — everything that did not demand any shred or patch of government. He dreamed of a tyranny, but it was that of Cosimo de' Medici.

VII

We gathered on Sunday evenings in two rooms, with folding doors between, and hung, I think, with photographs from Dutch masters, and in one room there was always, I think, a table with cold meat. I can recall but one elderly man — Dunn his name was — rather silent and full of good sense, an old friend of Henley's. We were young men, none as yet

established in his own, or in the world's opinion, and Henley was our leader and our confidant. One evening, I found him alone amused and exasperated: "Young A — — ," he cried "has just been round to ask my advice. Would I think it a wise thing if he bolted with Mrs B — — ? 'Have you quite determined to do it?' I asked him. 'Quite.' 'Well,' I said, 'in that case I refuse to give you any advice.'" Mrs B — — was a beautiful talented woman, who, as the Welsh Triad said of Guinievere, "was much given to being carried off." I think we listened to him, and often obeyed him, partly because he was quite plainly not upon the side of our parents. We might have a different ground of quarrel, but the result seemed more important than the ground, and his confident manner and speech made us believe, perhaps for the first time, in victory. And besides, if he did denounce, and in my case he certainly did, what we held in secret reverence, he never failed to associate it with things or persons that did not move us to reverence. Once I found him just returned from some art congress in Liverpool or in Manchester. "The salvation armyism of art," he called it, and gave a grotesque description of some city councillor he had found admiring Turner. Henley, who hated all that Ruskin praised, thereupon derided Turner, and finding the city councillor the next day on the other side of the gallery, admiring some Pre-Raphaelite there, derided that Pre-Raphaelite. The third day Henley discovered the poor man on a chair in the middle of the room staring disconsolately upon the floor. He terrified us also and certainly I did not dare, and I think none of us dared, to speak our admiration for book or picture he condemned, but he made us feel always our importance, and no man among us could do good work, or show the promise of it, and lack his praise. I can remember meeting of a Sunday night Charles Whibley, Kenneth Grahame, author of *The Golden Age*, Barry Pain, now a well-known novelist, R. A. M. Stevenson, art critic and a famous talker, George

Wyndham, later on a cabinet minister and Irish chief secretary, and now or later Oscar Wilde, who was some ten years older than the rest of us. But faces and names are vague to me and while faces that I met but once may rise clearly before me, a face met on many a Sunday has perhaps vanished. Kipling came sometimes, I think, but I never met him; and Stepniak, the Nihilist, whom I knew well elsewhere but not there, said — "I cannot go more than once a year, it is too exhausting." Henley got the best out of us all, because he had made us accept him as our judge and we knew that his judgment could neither sleep, nor be softened, nor changed, nor turned aside. When I think of him, the antithesis that is the foundation of human nature being ever in my sight, I see his crippled legs as though he were some Vulcan perpetually forging swords for other men to use; and certainly I always thought of C — — , a fine classical scholar, a pale and seemingly gentle man, as our chief swordsman and bravo. When Henley founded his weekly newspaper, first *The Scots*, afterwards *The National Observer*, this young man wrote articles and reviews notorious for savage wit; and years afterwards when *The National Observer* was dead, Henley dying, and our cavern of outlaws empty, I met him in Paris very sad and I think very poor. "Nobody will employ me now," he said. "Your master is gone," I answered, "and you are like the spear in an old Irish story that had to be kept dipped in poppy-juice that it might not go about killing people on its own account." I wrote my first good lyrics and tolerable essays for *The National Observer*, and as I always signed my work could go my own road in some measure. Henley often revised my lyrics, crossing out a line or a stanza and writing in one of his own, and I was comforted by my belief that he also rewrote Kipling then in the first flood of popularity. At first, indeed, I was ashamed of being rewritten and thought that others were not, and only began investigation when the editorial characteristics — epigrams,

archaisms, and all — appeared in the article upon Paris fashions and in that upon opium by an Egyptian Pasha. I was not compelled to full conformity for verse is plainly stubborn; and in prose, that I might avoid unacceptable opinions, I wrote nothing but ghost or fairy stories, picked up from my mother or some pilot at Rosses Point and Henley saw that I must needs mix a palette fitted to my subject matter. But if he had changed every "has" into "hath" I would have let him, for had not we sunned ourselves in his generosity? "My young men outdo me and they write better than I," he wrote in some letter praising Charles Whibley's work, and to another friend with a copy of my *Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland*: "See what a fine thing has been written by one of my lads."

VIII

My first meeting with Oscar Wilde was an astonishment. I never before heard a man talking with perfect sentences, as if he had written them all over night with labour and yet all spontaneous. There was present that night at Henley's, by right of propinquity or of accident, a man full of the secret spite of dulness, who interrupted from time to time, and always to check or disorder thought; and I noticed with what mastery he was foiled and thrown. I noticed, too, that the impression of artificiality that I think all Wilde's listeners have recorded came from the perfect rounding of the sentences and from the deliberation that made it possible. That very impression helped him, as the effect of metre, or of the antithetical prose of the seventeenth century, which is itself a true metre, helped its writers, for he could pass without incongruity from some unforeseen, swift stroke of wit to elaborate reverie. I heard him say a few nights later: "Give me *The Winter's Tale*, 'Daffodils that come before the swallow dare' but not *King*

Lear. What is *King Lear* but poor life staggering in the fog?" and the slow, carefully modulated cadence sounded natural to my ears. That first night he praised Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*: "It is my golden book; I never travel anywhere without it; but it is the very flower of decadence: the last trumpet should have sounded the moment it was written." "But," said the dull man, "would you not have given us time to read it?" "Oh no," was the retort, "there would have been plenty of time afterwards — in either world." I think he seemed to us, baffled as we were by youth, or by infirmity, a triumphant figure, and to some of us a figure from another age, an audacious Italian fifteenth century figure. A few weeks before I had heard one of my father's friends, an official in a publishing firm that had employed both Wilde and Henley as editors, blaming Henley who was "no use except under control" and praising Wilde, "so indolent but such a genius"; and now the firm became the topic of our talk. "How often do you go to the office?" said Henley. "I used to go three times a week," said Wilde, "for an hour a day but I have since struck off one of the days." "My God," said Henley, "I went five times a week for five hours a day and when I wanted to strike off a day they had a special committee meeting." "Furthermore," was Wilde's answer, "I never answered their letters. I have known men come to London full of bright prospects and seen them complete wrecks in a few months through a habit of answering letters." He too knew how to keep our elders in their place, and his method was plainly the more successful, for Henley had been dismissed. "No he is not an aesthete," Henley commented later, being somewhat embarrassed by Wilde's Pre-Raphaelite entanglement; "one soon finds that he is a scholar and a gentleman." And when I dined with Wilde a few days afterwards he began at once, "I had to strain every nerve to equal that man at all"; and I was too loyal to speak my thought: "You and not he said all the brilliant

things." He like the rest of us had felt the strain of an intensity that seemed to hold life at the point of drama. He had said on that first meeting "The basis of literary friendship is mixing the poisoned bowl"; and for a few weeks Henley and he became close friends till, the astonishment of their meeting over, diversity of character and ambition pushed them apart, and, with half the cavern helping, Henley began mixing the poisoned bowl for Wilde. Yet Henley never wholly lost that first admiration, for after Wilde's downfall he said to me: "Why did he do it? I told my lads to attack him and yet we might have fought under his banner."

IX

It became the custom, both at Henley's and at Bedford Park, to say that R. A. M. Stevenson, who frequented both circles, was the better talker. Wilde had been trussed up like a turkey by undergraduates, dragged up and down a hill, his champagne emptied into the ice tub, hooted in the streets of various towns, and I think stoned, and no newspaper named him but in scorn; his manner had hardened to meet opposition and at times he allowed one to see an unpardonable insolence. His charm was acquired and systematized, a mask which he wore only when it pleased him, while the charm of Stevenson belonged to him like the colour of his hair. If Stevenson's talk became monologue we did not know it, because our one object was to show by our attention that he need never leave off. If thought failed him we would not combat what he had said, or start some new theme, but would encourage him with a question; and one felt that it had been always so from childhood up. His mind was full of phantasy for phantasy's sake and he gave as good entertainment in monologue as his cousin Robert Louis in poem or story. He was always "supposing"; "Suppose you had two

millions what would you do with it?" and "Suppose you were in Spain and in love how would you propose?" I recall him one afternoon at our house at Bedford Park, surrounded by my brother and sisters and a little group of my father's friends, describing proposals in half a dozen countries. There your father did it, dressed in such and such a way with such and such words, and there a friend must wait for the lady outside the chapel door, sprinkle her with holy water and say, "My friend Jones is dying for love of you." But when it was over those quaint descriptions, so full of laughter and sympathy, faded or remained in the memory as something alien from one's own life, like a dance I once saw in a great house, where beautifully dressed children wound a long ribbon in and out as they danced. I was not of Stevenson's party and mainly I think because he had written a book in praise of Velasquez, praise at that time universal wherever Pre-Raphaelism was accurst, and to my mind, that had to pick its symbols where its ignorance permitted, Velasquez seemed the first bored celebrant of boredom. I was convinced from some obscure meditation that Stevenson's conversational method had joined him to my elders and to the indifferent world, as though it were right for old men, and unambitious men and all women, to be content with charm and humour. It was the prerogative of youth to take sides and when Wilde said: "Mr Bernard Shaw has no enemies but is intensely disliked by all his friends," I knew it to be a phrase I should never forget, and felt revenged upon a notorious hater of romance, whose generosity and courage I could not fathom.

X

I saw a good deal of Wilde at that time — was it 1887 or 1888? — I have no way of fixing the date except that I had published my first book

The Wanderings of Usheen and that Wilde had not yet published his *Decay of Lying*. He had, before our first meeting, reviewed my book and despite its vagueness of intention, and the inexactness of its speech, praised without qualification; and what was worth more than any review he had talked about it and now he asked me to eat my Christmas dinner with him believing, I imagine, that I was alone in London. He had just renounced his velveteen, and even those cuffs turned backward over the sleeves, and had begun to dress very carefully in the fashion of the moment. He lived in a little house at Chelsea that the architect Godwin had decorated with an elegance that owed something to Whistler. There was nothing mediaeval, nor Pre-Raphaelite, no cupboard door with figures upon flat gold, no peacock blue, no dark background. I remember vaguely a white drawing room with Whistler etchings, "let in" to white panels, and a dining room all white, chairs, walls, mantelpiece, carpet, except for a diamond-shaped piece of red cloth in the middle of the table under a terra-cotta statuette, and I think a red shaded lamp hanging from the ceiling to a little above the statuette. It was perhaps too perfect in its unity, his past of a few years before had gone too completely, and I remember thinking that the perfect harmony of his life there, with his beautiful wife and his two young children, suggested some deliberate artistic composition.

He commended and dispraised himself during dinner by attributing characteristics like his own to his country: "We Irish are too poetical to be poets; we are a nation of brilliant failures, but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks." When dinner was over he read me from the proofs of *The Decay of Lying* and when he came to the sentence: "Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism that characterises modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy," I said, "Why do you change 'sad' to 'melancholy'?" He

replied that he wanted a full sound at the close of his sentence, and I thought it no excuse and an example of the vague impressiveness that spoilt his writing for me. Only when he spoke, or when his writing was the mirror of his speech, or in some simple fairy tale, had he words exact enough to hold a subtle ear. He alarmed me, though not as Henley did, for I never left his house thinking myself fool or dunce. He flattered the intellect of every man he liked; he made me tell him long Irish stories and compared my art of storytelling to Homer's; and once when he had described himself as writing in the census paper "age 19, profession genius, infirmity talent" the other guest, a young journalist fresh from Oxford or Cambridge, said, "What should I have written?" and was told that it should have been "profession talent, infirmity genius." When, however, I called, wearing shoes a little too yellow — unblackened leather had just become fashionable — I realized their extravagance when I saw his eyes fixed upon them; and another day Wilde asked me to tell his little boy a fairy story, and I had but got as far as "Once upon a time there was a giant" when the little boy screamed and ran out of the room. Wilde looked grave and I was plunged into the shame of clumsiness that afflicts the young. When I asked for some literary gossip for some provincial newspaper, that paid me a few shillings a month, he explained very explicitly that writing literary gossip was no job for a gentleman.

Though to be compared to Homer passed the time pleasantly, I had not been greatly perturbed had he stopped me with: "Is it a long story?" as Henley would certainly have done. I was abashed before him as wit and man of the world alone. I remember that he deprecated the very general belief in his success or his efficiency, and I think with sincerity. One form of success had gone: he was no more the lion of the season and he had not discovered his gift for writing comedy, yet I think I knew him at the

happiest moment of his life. No scandal had touched his name, his fame as a talker was growing among his equals, and he seemed to live in the enjoyment of his own spontaneity. One day he began: “I have been inventing a Christian heresy,” and he told a detailed story, in the style of some early father, of how Christ recovered after the Crucifixion, and escaping from the tomb, lived on for many years, the one man upon earth who knew the falsehood of Christianity. Once St Paul visited his town and he alone in the carpenters’ quarter did not go to hear him preach. The other carpenters noticed that henceforth, for some unknown reason, he kept his hands covered. A few days afterwards I found Wilde with smock frocks in various colours spread out upon the floor in front of him, while a missionary explained that he did not object to the heathen going naked upon week days, but insisted upon clothes in church. He had brought the smock frocks in a cab that the only art-critic whose fame had reached Central Africa might select a colour; so Wilde sat there weighing all with a conscious ecclesiastic solemnity.

XI

Of late years I have often explained Wilde to myself by his family history. His father was a friend or acquaintance of my father’s father and among my family traditions there is an old Dublin riddle: “Why are Sir William Wilde’s nails so black?” Answer, “Because he has scratched himself.” And there is an old story still current in Dublin of Lady Wilde saying to a servant, “Why do you put the plates on the coal-scuttle? What are the chairs meant for?” They were famous people and there are many like stories; and even a horrible folk story, the invention of some Connaught peasant, that tells how Sir William Wilde took out the eyes of some men,

who had come to consult him as an oculist, and laid them upon a plate, intending to replace them in a moment, and how the eyes were eaten by a cat. As a certain friend of mine, who has made a prolonged study of the nature of cats, said when he first heard the tale, “Cats love eyes.” The Wilde family was clearly of the sort that fed the imagination of Charles Lever, dirty, untidy, daring, and what Charles Lever, who loved more normal activities, might not have valued so highly, very imaginative and learned. Lady Wilde, who when I knew her received her friends with blinds drawn and shutters closed that none might see her withered face, longed always perhaps, though certainly amid much self-mockery, for some impossible splendour of character and circumstance. She lived near her son in level Chelsea, but I have heard her say, “I want to live on some high place, Primrose Hill or Highgate, because I was an eagle in my youth.” I think her son lived with no self-mockery at all an imaginary life; perpetually performed a play which was in all things the opposite of all that he had known in childhood and early youth; never put off completely his wonder at opening his eyes every morning on his own beautiful house, and in remembering that he had dined yesterday with a duchess, and that he delighted in Flaubert and Pater, read Homer in the original and not as a schoolmaster reads him for the grammar. I think, too, that because of all that half-civilized blood in his veins he could not endure the sedentary toil of creative art and so remained a man of action, exaggerating, for the sake of immediate effect, every trick learned from his masters, turning their easel painting into painted scenes. He was a parvenu, but a parvenu whose whole bearing proved that if he did dedicate every story in *The House of Pomegranates* to a lady of title, it was but to show that he was Jack and the social ladder his pantomime beanstalk. “Did you ever hear him say

‘Marquess of Dimmesdale’?” a friend of his once asked me. “He does not say ‘the Duke of York’ with any pleasure.”

He told me once that he had been offered a safe seat in Parliament and, had he accepted, he might have had a career like that of Beaconsfield, whose early style resembles his, being meant for crowds, for excitement, for hurried decisions, for immediate triumphs. Such men get their sincerity, if at all, from the contact of events; the dinner table was Wilde’s event and made him the greatest talker of his time, and his plays and dialogues have what merit they possess from being now an imitation, now a record, of his talk. Even in those days I would often defend him by saying that his very admiration for his predecessors in poetry, for Browning, for Swinburne and Rossetti, in their first vogue while he was a very young man, made any success seem impossible that could satisfy his immense ambition: never but once before had the artist seemed so great, never had the work of art seemed so difficult. I would then compare him with Benvenuto Cellini who, coming after Michael Angelo, found nothing left to do so satisfactory as to turn bravo and quarrel with the man who broke Michael Angelo’s nose.

XII

I cannot remember who first brought me to the old stable beside Kelmscott House, William Morris’s house at Hammersmith, and to the debates held there upon Sunday evenings by the Socialist League. I was soon of the little group who had supper with Morris afterwards. I met at these suppers very constantly Walter Crane, Emery Walker, in association with Cobden Sanderson, the printer of many fine books, and less constantly Bernard Shaw and Cockerell, now of the Museum of Cambridge, and perhaps but once or twice Hyndman the Socialist and the Anarchist Prince

Kropotkin. There, too, one always met certain more or less educated workmen, rough of speech and manner, with a conviction to meet every turn. I was told by one of them, on a night when I had done perhaps more than my share of the talking, that I had talked more nonsense in one evening than he had heard in the whole course of his past life. I had merely preferred Parnell, then at the height of his career, to Michael Davitt, who had wrecked his Irish influence by international politics. We sat round a long unpolished and unpainted trestle table of new wood in a room where hung Rossetti's *Pomegranate*, a portrait of Mrs. Morris, and where one wall and part of the ceiling were covered by a great Persian carpet. Morris had said somewhere or other that carpets were meant for people who took their shoes off when they entered a house and were most in place upon a tent floor. I was a little disappointed in the house, for Morris was an old man content at last to gather beautiful things rather than to arrange a beautiful house. I saw the drawing-room once or twice, and there alone all my sense of decoration, founded upon the background of Rossetti's pictures, was satisfied by a big cupboard painted with a scene from Chaucer by Burne-Jones; but even there were objects, perhaps a chair or a little table, that seemed accidental, bought hurriedly perhaps and with little thought, to make wife or daughter comfortable. I had read as a boy, in books belonging to my father, the third volume of *The Earthly Paradise*, and *The Defence of Guenevere*, which pleased me less, but had not opened either for a long time. *The Man Who Never Laughed Again* had seemed the most wonderful of tales till my father had accused me of preferring Morris to Keats, got angry about it, and put me altogether out of countenance. He had spoiled my pleasure, for now I questioned while I read and at last ceased to read; nor had Morris written as yet those prose romances that became after his death so great a joy that they were the only books I was ever to read slowly

that I might not come too quickly to the end. It was now Morris himself that stirred my interest, and I took to him first because of some little tricks of speech and body that reminded me of my old grandfather in Sligo, but soon discovered his spontaneity and joy and made him my chief of men. To-day I do not set his poetry very high, but for an odd altogether wonderful line, or thought; and yet, if some angel offered me the choice, I would choose to live his life, poetry and all, rather than my own or any other man's. A reproduction of his portrait by Watts hangs over my mantelpiece with Henley's, and those of other friends. Its grave wide-open eyes, like the eyes of some dreaming beast, remind me of the open eyes of Titian's "Ariosto," while the broad vigorous body suggests a mind that has no need of the intellect to remain sane, though it give itself to every phantasy: the dreamer of the middle ages. It is "the fool of fairy ... wide and wild as a hill," the resolute European image that yet half remembers Buddha's motionless meditation, and has no trait in common with the wavering, lean image of hungry speculation, that cannot but fill the mind's eye because of certain famous Hamlets of our stage. Shakespeare himself foreshadowed a symbolic change, that shows a change in the whole temperament of the world, for though he called his Hamlet "fat" and even "scant of breath," he thrust between his fingers agile rapier and dagger.

The dream world of Morris was as much the antithesis of daily life as with other men of genius, but he was never conscious of the antithesis and so knew nothing of intellectual suffering. His intellect, unexhausted by speculation or casuistry, was wholly at the service of hand and eye, and whatever he pleased he did with an unheard of ease and simplicity, and if style and vocabulary were at times monotonous, he could not have made them otherwise without ceasing to be himself. Instead of the language of Chaucer and Shakespeare, its warp fresh from field and market, if the woof

were learned, his age offered him a speech, exhausted from abstraction, that only returned to its full vitality when written learnedly and slowly.

The roots of his antithetical dream were visible enough: a never idle man of great physical strength and extremely irascible — did he not fling a badly baked plum pudding through the window upon Christmas Day? — a man more joyous than any intellectual man of our world, called himself "the idle singer of an empty day," created new forms of melancholy, and faint persons, like the knights and ladies of Burne-Jones, who are never, no not once in forty volumes, put out of temper. A blunderer who had said to the only unconverted man at a Socialist picnic in Dublin, to prove that equality came easy, "I was brought up a gentleman and now as you can see associate with all sorts" and left wounds thereby that rankled after twenty years, a man of whom I have heard it said "He is always afraid that he is doing something wrong and generally is," wrote long stories with apparently no other object than that his persons might show to one another, through situations of poignant difficulty the most exquisite tact.

He did not project like Henley or like Wilde, an image of himself, because having all his imagination set upon making and doing he had little self knowledge. He imagined instead new conditions of making and doing; and in the teeth of those scientific generalizations that cowed my boyhood, I can see some like imagining in every great change, believing that the first flying fish first leaped, not because it sought "adaptation" to the air, but out of horror of the sea.

XIII

Soon after I began to attend the lectures a French class was started in the old coach-house for certain young Socialists who planned a tour in France,

and I joined it, and was for a time a model student constantly encouraged by the compliments of the old French mistress. I told my father of the class, and he asked me to get my sisters admitted. I made difficulties and put off speaking of the matter, for I knew that the new and admirable self I was making would turn, under family eyes, into plain rag-doll. How could I pretend to be industrious, and even carry dramatisation to the point of learning my lessons, when my sisters were there and knew that I was nothing of the kind? But I had no argument I could use, and my sisters were admitted. They said nothing unkind, so far as I can remember, but in a week or two I was my old procrastinating idle self and had soon left the class altogether. My elder sister stayed on and became an embroideress under Miss May Morris, and the hangings round Morris's big bed at Kelmscott House, Oxfordshire, with their verses about lying happily in bed when "all birds sing in the town of the tree," were from her needle, though not from her design. She worked for the first few months at Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, and in my imagination I cannot always separate what I saw and heard from her report, or indeed from the report of that tribe or guild who looked up to Morris as to some worshipped mediaeval king. He had no need for other people. I doubt if their marriage or death made him sad or glad, and yet no man I have known was so well loved; you saw him producing everywhere organisation and beauty, seeming, almost in the same instant, helpless and triumphant; and people loved him as children are loved. People much in his neighbourhood became gradually occupied with him or about his affairs, and, without any wish on his part, as simple people become occupied with children. I remember a man who was proud and pleased because he had distracted Morris's thoughts from an attack of gout by leading the conversation delicately to the hated name of Milton. He began at Swinburne: "O, Swinburne," said Morris, "is a rhetorician; my

masters have been Keats and Chaucer, for they make pictures." "Does not Milton make pictures?" asked my informant. "No," was the answer, "Dante makes pictures, but Milton, though he had a great earnest mind, expressed himself as a rhetorician." "Great earnest mind" sounded strange to me, and I doubt not that were his questioner not a simple man Morris had been more violent. Another day the same man started by praising Chaucer, but the gout was worse, and Morris cursed Chaucer for destroying the English language with foreign words.

He had few detachable phrases, and I can remember little of his speech, which many thought the best of all good talk, except that it matched his burly body and seemed within definite boundaries inexhaustible in fact and expression. He alone of all the men I have known seemed guided by some beast-like instinct and never ate strange meat. "Balzac! Balzac!" he said to me once, "oh, that was the man the French Bourgeoisie read so much a few years ago." I can remember him at supper praising wine: "Why do people say it is prosaic to be inspired by wine? Has it not been made by the sunlight and the sap?" and his dispraising houses decorated by himself: "Do you suppose I like that kind of house? I would like a house like a big barn, where one ate in one corner, cooked in another corner, slept in the third corner, and in the fourth received one's friends"; and his complaining of Ruskin's objection to the underground railway: "If you must have a railway the best thing you can do with it is to put it in a tube with a cork at each end." I remember, too, that when I asked what led up to his movement, he replied: "Oh, Ruskin and Carlyle, but somebody should have been beside Carlyle and punched his head every five minutes." Though I remember little, I do not doubt that, had I continued going there on Sunday evenings, I should have caught fire from his words and turned my hand to some mediaeval work or other.

Just before I had ceased to go there I had sent my *Wanderings of Usheen* to his daughter, hoping of course that it might meet his eyes, and soon after sending it I came upon him by chance in Holborn — "You write my sort of poetry," he said and began to praise me and to promise to send his praise to *The Commonwealth*, the League organ, and he would have said more had he not caught sight of a new ornamental cast-iron lamp post and got very heated upon that subject.

I did not read economics, having turned socialist because of Morris's lectures and pamphlets, and I think it unlikely that Morris himself could read economics. That old dogma of mine seemed germane to the matter. If the men and women imagined by the poets were the norm, and if Morris had, in let us say "News from Nowhere," then running through *The Commonwealth*, described such men and women, living under their natural conditions, or as they would desire to live, then those conditions themselves must be the norm and could we but get rid of certain institutions the world would turn from eccentricity. Perhaps Morris himself justified himself in his own heart by as simple an argument, and was, as the socialist D — — said to me one night, walking home after some lecture, "an anarchist without knowing it." Certainly I and all about me, including D — — himself, were for chopping up the old king for Medea's pot. Morris had told us to have nothing to do with the parliamentary socialists, represented for men in general by the Fabian Society and Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation and for us in particular by D — — . During the period of transition mistakes must be made, and the discredit of these mistakes must be left to "the Bourgeoisie"; and besides, when you begin to talk of this measure, or that other, you lose sight of the goal, and see, to reverse Swinburne's description of Tiresias, "Light on the way but darkness on the goal." By mistakes Morris meant vexatious restrictions and compromises

— “If any man puts me into a labour squad, I will lie on my back and kick.” That phrase very much expresses our idea of revolutionary tactics: we all intended to lie upon our back and kick. D — — , pale and sedentary, did not dislike labour squads and we all hated him with the left side of our heads, while admiring him immensely with the right side. He alone was invited to entertain Mrs Morris, having many tales of his Irish uncles, more especially of one particular uncle who had tried to commit suicide by shutting his head into a carpet-bag. At that time he was an obscure man, known only for a witty speaker at street corners and in Park demonstrations. He had, with an assumed truculence and fury, cold logic, an invariable gentleness, an unruffled courtesy, and yet could never close a speech without being denounced by a journeyman hatter, with an Italian name. Converted to socialism by D — — , and to anarchism by himself, with swinging arm and uplifted voice, this man put, and perhaps, exaggerated our scruple about Parliament. “I lack,” said D — — , “the bump of reverence”; whereon the wild man shouted: “You ‘ave a ‘ole.” There are moments when looking back I somewhat confuse my own figure with that of the hatter, image of our hysteria, for I too became violent with the violent solemnity of a religious devotee. I can even remember sitting behind D — — and saying some rude thing or other over his shoulder.

I don’t remember why I gave it up but I did quite suddenly and the push may have come from a young workman who was educating himself between Morris and Karl Marx. He had planned a history of the Navy, and when I had spoken of the battleships of Nelson’s day had said, “O, that was the decadence of the battleship,” but if his naval interests were mediæval, his ideas about religion were pure Karl Marx, and we were soon in perpetual argument. Then gradually the attitude towards religion of almost everybody but Morris, who avoided the subject altogether, got upon my

nerves, for I broke out after some lecture or other with all the arrogance of raging youth. They attacked religion, I said, or some such words, and yet there must be a change of heart and only religion could make it. What was the use of talking about some new revolution putting all things right, when the change must come, if come it did, with astronomical slowness, like the cooling of the sun, or it may have been like the drying of the moon? Morris rang his chairman's bell, but I was too angry to listen, and he had to ring it a second time before I sat down. He said that night at supper, "Of course I know there must be a change of heart, but it will not come as slowly as all that. I rang my bell because you were not being understood." He did not show any vexation, but I never returned after that night; and yet I did not always believe what I had said, and only gradually gave up thinking of and planning for some near sudden change for the better.

XIV

I spent my days at the British Museum and must, I think, have been delicate, for I remember often putting off hour after hour consulting some necessary book because I shrank from lifting the heavy volumes of the catalogue; and yet to save money for my afternoon coffee and roll I often walked the whole way home to Bedford Park. I was compiling, for a series of shilling books, an anthology of Irish fairy-stories and, for an American publisher, a two-volume selection from the Irish novelists that would be somewhat dearer. I was not well paid, for each book cost me more than three months' reading; and I was paid for the first some twelve pounds ("O, Mr. E.," said publisher to editor, "you must never again pay so much!") and for the second twenty, but I did not think myself badly paid, for I had chosen the work for my own purposes.

Though I went to Sligo every summer, I was compelled to live out of Ireland the greater part of every year, and was but keeping my mind upon what I knew must be the subject-matter of my poetry. I believed that if Morris had set his stories amid the scenery of his own Wales, for I knew him to be of Welsh extraction and supposed wrongly that he had spent his childhood there, that if Shelley had nailed his *Prometheus*, or some equal symbol, upon some Welsh or Scottish rock, their art had entered more intimately, more microscopically, as it were, into our thought and had given perhaps to modern poetry a breadth and stability like that of ancient poetry. The statues of Mausolus and Artemisia at the British Museum, private, half-animal, half-divine figures, all unlike the Grecian athletes and Egyptian kings in their near neighbourhood, that stand in the middle of the crowd's applause, or sit above measuring it out unpersuadable justice, became to me, now or later, images of an unpremeditated joyous energy, that neither I nor any other man, racked by doubt and inquiry, can achieve; and that yet, if once achieved, might seem to men and women of Connemara or of Galway their very soul. In our study of that ruined tomb raised by a queen to her dead lover, and finished by the unpaid labour of great sculptors, after her death from grief, or so runs the tale, we cannot distinguish the handiworks of Scopas and Praxiteles; and I wanted to create once more an art where the artist's handiwork would hide as under those half anonymous chisels, or as we find it in some old Scots ballads, or in some twelfth or thirteenth century Arthurian Romance. That handiwork assured, I had martyred no man for modelling his own image upon Pallas Athena's buckler; for I took great pleasure in certain allusions to the singer's life, one finds in old romances and ballads, and thought his presence there all the more poignant because we discover it half lost, like portly Chaucer, behind his own maunciple and pardoner upon the Canterbury roads. Wolfram von Eschenbach, singing his

German Parsifal, broke off some description of a famished city to remember that in his own house at home the very mice lacked food, and what old ballad singer was it who claimed to have fought by day in the very battle he sang by night? So masterful indeed was that instinct that when the minstrel knew not who his poet was, he must needs make up a man: "When any stranger asks who is the sweetest of singers, answer with one voice: 'a blind man; he dwells upon rocky Chios; his songs shall be the most beautiful for ever.'" Elaborate modern psychology sounds egotistical, I thought, when it speaks in the first person, but not those simple emotions which resemble the more, the more powerful they are, everybody's emotion, and I was soon to write many poems where an always personal emotion was woven into a general pattern of myth and symbol. When the Fenian poet says that his heart has grown cold and callous — "For thy hapless fate, dear Ireland, and sorrows of my own" — he but follows tradition and if he does not move us deeply, it is because he has no sensuous musical vocabulary that comes at need, without compelling him to sedentary toil and so driving him out from his fellows. I thought to create that sensuous, musical vocabulary, and not for myself only, but that I might leave it to later Irish poets, much as a mediæval Japanese painter left his style as an inheritance to his family, and was careful to use a traditional manner and matter, yet did something altogether different, changed by that toil, impelled by my share in Cain's curse, by all that sterile modern complication, by my "originality," as the newspapers call it. Morris set out to make a revolution that the persons of his *Well at the World's End* or his *Waters of the Wondrous Isles*, always, to my mind, in the likeness of Artemisia and her man, might walk his native scenery; and I, that my native scenery might find imaginary inhabitants, half-planned a new method and a new culture. My mind began drifting vaguely towards that doctrine of "the mask" which has convinced me that

every passionate man (I have nothing to do with mechanist, or philanthropist, or man whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy. Napoleon was never of his own time, as the naturalistic writers and painters bid all men be, but had some Roman emperor's image in his head and some condottiere blood in his heart; and when he crowned that head at Rome with his own hands he had covered, as may be seen from David's painting, his hesitation with that emperor's old suit.

XV

I had various women friends on whom I would call towards five o'clock mainly to discuss my thoughts that I could not bring to a man without meeting some competing thought, but partly because their tea and toast saved my pennies for the 'bus ride home; but with women, apart from their intimate exchanges of thought, I was timid and abashed. I was sitting on a seat in front of the British Museum feeding pigeons when a couple of girls sat near and began enticing my pigeons away, laughing and whispering to one another, and I looked straight in front of me, very indignant, and presently went into the Museum without turning my head towards them. Since then I have often wondered if they were pretty or merely very young. Sometimes I told myself very adventurous love-stories with myself for hero, and at other times I planned out a life of lonely austerity, and at other times mixed the ideals and planned a life of lonely austerity mitigated by periodical lapses. I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball

upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem *Innisfree*, my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music. I had begun to loosen rhythm as an escape from rhetoric and from that emotion of the crowd that rhetoric brings, but I only understood vaguely and occasionally that I must for my special purpose use nothing but the common syntax. A couple of years later I would not have written that first line with its conventional archaism — "Arise and go" — nor the inversion in the last stanza. Passing another day by the new Law Courts, a building that I admired because it was Gothic — "It is not very good," Morris had said, "but it is better than anything else they have got and so they hate it" — I grew suddenly oppressed by the great weight of stone, and thought, "There are miles and miles of stone and brick all round me," and presently added, "If John the Baptist or his like were to come again and had his mind set upon it, he could make all these people go out into some wilderness leaving their buildings empty," and that thought, which does not seem very valuable now, so enlightened the day that it is still vivid in the memory. I spent a few days at Oxford copying out a seventeenth century translation of Poggio's *Liber Facetiarum* or the *Hypneroto-machia* of Poliphili for a publisher; I forget which, for I copied both; and returned very pale to my troubled family. I had lived upon bread and tea because I thought that if antiquity found locust and wild honey nutritive, my soul was strong enough to need no better. I was always planning some great gesture, putting the whole world into one scale of the balance and my soul into the other and imagining that the whole world somehow kicked the beam. More than thirty years have passed and I have seen no forcible young man of letters brave the metropolis, without some like stimulant; and all after two or three, or twelve or fifteen years, according to obstinacy, have understood that we achieve, if we do achieve,

in little sedentary stitches as though we were making lace. I had one unmeasured advantage from my stimulant: I could ink my socks, that they might not show through my shoes, with a most haughty mind, imagining myself, and my torn tackle, somewhere else, in some far place "under the canopy ... i' the city of kites and crows."

In London I saw nothing good and constantly remembered that Ruskin had said to some friend of my father's — "As I go to my work at the British Museum I see the faces of the people become daily more corrupt." I convinced myself for a time, that on the same journey I saw but what he saw. Certain old women's faces filled me with horror, faces that are no longer there, or if they are pass before me unnoticed: the fat blotched faces, rising above double chins, of women who have drunk too much beer and eaten much meat. In Dublin I had often seen old women walking with erect heads and gaunt bodies, talking to themselves with loud voices, mad with drink and poverty, but they were different, they belonged to romance. Da Vinci had drawn women who looked so and so carried their bodies.

XVI

I attempted to restore one old friend of my father's to the practice of his youth, but failed, though he, unlike my father, had not changed his belief. My father brought me to dine with Jack Nettleship at Wigmore Street, once inventor of imaginative designs and now a painter of melodramatic lions. At dinner I had talked a great deal — too much, I imagine, for so young a man, or maybe for any man — and on the way home my father, who had been plainly anxious that I should make a good impression, was very angry. He said I had talked for effect and that talking for effect was precisely what one must never do; he had always hated rhetoric and emphasis and had

made me hate it; and his anger plunged me into great dejection. I called at Nettleship's studio the next day to apologise, and Nettleship opened the door himself and received me with enthusiasm. He had explained to some woman guest that I would probably talk well, being an Irishman, but the reality had surpassed, etc., etc. I was not flattered, though relieved at not having to apologise, for I soon discovered that what he really admired was my volubility, for he himself was very silent. He seemed about sixty, had a bald head, a grey beard, and a nose, as one of my father's friends used to say, like an opera-glass, and sipped cocoa all the afternoon and evening from an enormous tea-cup that must have been designed for him alone, not caring how cold the cocoa grew. Years before he had been thrown from his horse, while hunting, and broke his arm, and because it had been badly set suffered great pain for a long time. A little whisky would always stop the pain, and soon a little became a great deal and he found himself a drunkard, but having signed his liberty away for certain months he was completely cured. He had acquired, however, the need of some liquid which he could sip constantly. I brought him an admiration settled in early boyhood, for my father had always said, "George Wilson was our born painter, but Nettleship our genius," and even had he shown me nothing I could care for, I had admired him still because my admiration was in my bones. He showed me his early designs, and they, though often badly drawn, fulfilled my hopes. Something of Blake they certainly did show, but had in place of Blake's joyous, intellectual energy a Saturnian passion and melancholy. "God Creating Evil," the death-like head with a woman and a tiger coming from the forehead, which Rossetti — or was it Browning? — had described "as the most sublime design of ancient or modern art," had been lost, but there was another version of the same thought, and other designs never published or exhibited. They rise before me even now in meditation,

especially a blind Titan-like ghost floating with groping hands above the tree-tops. I wrote a criticism, and arranged for reproductions with the editor of an art magazine, but after it was written and accepted the proprietor, lifting what I considered an obsequious caw in the Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, Bastien-Lepage rookery, insisted upon its rejection. Nettleship did not mind its rejection, saying, "Who cares for such things now? Not ten people," but he did mind my refusal to show him what I had written. Though what I had written was all eulogy, I dreaded his judgment for it was my first art criticism. I hated his big lion pictures, where he attempted an art too much concerned with the sense of touch, with the softness or roughness, the minutely observed irregularity of surfaces, for his genius; and I think he knew it. "Rossetti used to call my pictures pot-boilers," he said, "but they are all — all" — and he waved his arm to the canvasses — "symbols." When I wanted him to design gods, and angels, and lost spirits once more, he always came back to the point "Nobody would be pleased." "Everybody should have a *raison d'être*" was one of his phrases. "Mrs — — 's articles are not good but they are her *raison d'être*." I had but little knowledge of art for there was little scholarship in the Dublin art school, so I overrated the quality of anything that could be connected with my general beliefs about the world. If I had been able to give angelical or diabolical names to his lions I might have liked them also and I think that Nettleship himself would have liked them better and liking them better have become a better painter. We had the same kind of religious feeling, but I could give a crude philosophical expression to mine while he could only express his in action or with brush and pencil. He often told me of certain ascetic ambitions, very much like my own, for he had kept all the moral ambition of youth, as for instance — "Yeats, the other night I was arrested by a policeman — was walking round Regent's Park barefooted to keep the

flesh under — good sort of thing to do. I was carrying my boots in my hand and he thought I was a burglar and even when I explained and gave him half a crown, he would not let me go till I had promised to put on my boots before I met the next policeman."

He was very proud and shy and I could not imagine anybody asking him questions and so I was content to take these stories as they came: confirmations of what I had heard of him in boyhood. One story in particular had stirred my imagination for, ashamed all my boyhood of my lack of physical courage, I admired what was beyond my imitation. He thought that any weakness, even a weakness of body, had the character of sin and while at breakfast with his brother, with whom he shared a room on the third floor of a corner house, he said that his nerves were out of order. Presently he left the table, and got out through the window and on to a stone ledge that ran along the wall under the windowsills. He sidled along the ledge, and turning the corner with it, got in at a different window and returned to the table. "My nerves," he said, "are better than I thought."

Nettleship said to me: "Has Edwin Ellis ever said anything about the effect of drink upon my genius?" "No," I answered. "I ask," he said, "because I have always thought that Ellis has some strange medical insight." Though I had answered no, Ellis had only a few days before used these words: "Nettleship drank his genius away." Ellis, but lately returned from Perugia where he had lived many years, was another old friend of my father's but some years younger than Nettleship or my father. Nettleship had found his simplifying image, but in his painting had turned away from it, while Ellis, the son of Alexander Ellis, a once famous man of science, who was perhaps the last man in England to run the circle of the sciences without superficiality, had never found that image at all. He was a painter and poet, but his painting, which did not interest me, showed no influence

but that of Leighton. He had started perhaps a couple of years too late for Pre-Raphaelite influence, for no great Pre-Raphaelite picture was painted after 1870, and left England too soon for that of the French painters. He was, however, sometimes moving as a poet and still more often an astonishment. I have known him cast something just said into a dozen lines of musical verse, without apparently ceasing to talk; but the work once done he could not or would not amend it, and my father thought he lacked all ambition. Yet he had at times nobility of rhythm — an instinct for grandeur, and after thirty years I still repeat to myself his address to Mother Earth —

"O mother of the hills, forgive our towers,
O mother of the clouds forgive our dreams."

And there are certain whole poems that I read from time to time or try to make others read. There is that poem where the manner is unworthy of the matter, being loose and facile, describing Adam and Eve fleeing from Paradise. Adam asks Eve what she carries so carefully, and Eve replies that it is a little of the apple-core kept for their children. There is that vision concerning *Christ the Less*, a too hurriedly written ballad, where the half of Christ sacrificed to the divine half "that fled to seek felicity" wanders wailing through Golgotha, and there is *The Saint and the Youth*, in which I can discover no fault at all. He loved complexities — "Seven silences like candles round her face" is a line of his — and whether he wrote well or ill had always a manner which I would have known from that of any other poet. He would say to me, "I am a mathematician with the mathematics left out" — his father was a great mathematician — or "A woman once said to me, 'Mr Ellis, why are your poems like sums?'" And certainly he loved symbols and abstractions. He said once, when I had asked him not to

mention something or other, “Surely you have discovered by this time that I know of no means whereby I can mention a fact in conversation.”

He had a passion for Blake, picked up in Pre-Raphaelite studios, and early in our acquaintance put into my hands a scrap of notepaper on which he had written some years before an interpretation of the poem that begins

“The fields from Islington to Marylebone,
To Primrose Hill and St. John’s Wood,
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalem’s pillars stood.”

The four quarters of London represented Blake’s four great mythological personages, the Zoas, and also the four elements. These few sentences were the foundation of all study of the philosophy of William Blake that requires an exact knowledge for its pursuit and that traces the connection between his system and that of Swedenborg or of Boehme. I recognised certain attributions, from what is sometimes called the Christian Cabbala, of which Ellis had never heard, and with this proof that his interpretation was more than fantasy he and I began our four years’ work upon the Prophetic Books of William Blake. We took it as almost a sign of Blake’s personal help when we discovered that the spring of 1889, when we first joined our knowledge, was one hundred years from the publication of *The Book of Thel*, the first published of the Prophetic Books, as though it were firmly established that the dead delight in anniversaries. After months of discussion and reading we made a concordance of all Blake’s mystical terms, and there was much copying to be done in the Museum and at Red Hill, where the descendants of Blake’s friend and patron, the landscape painter John Linnell, had many manuscripts. The Linnells were narrow in their religious ideas and doubtful of Blake’s orthodoxy, whom they held, however, in great honour, and I

remember a timid old lady who had known Blake when a child saying, “He had very wrong ideas, he did not believe in the historical Jesus.” One old man sat always beside us, ostensibly to sharpen our pencils but perhaps really to see that we did not steal the manuscripts, and they gave us very old port at lunch, and I have upon my dining-room walls their present of Blake’s Dante engravings. Going thither and returning Ellis would entertain me by philosophical discussion varied with improvised stories, at first folk-tales which he professed to have picked up in Scotland, and, though I had read and collected many folk tales, I did not see through the deceit. I have a partial memory of two more elaborate tales, one of an Italian conspirator flying barefoot, from I forget what adventure through I forget what Italian city, in the early morning. Fearing to be recognised by his bare feet, he slipped past the sleepy porter at an hotel, calling out “number so and so” as if he were some belated guest. Then passing from bedroom door to door he tried on the boots, and just as he got a pair to fit, a voice cried from the room: “Who is that?” “Merely me, sir,” he called back, “taking your boots.” The other was of a martyr’s Bible, round which the cardinal virtues had taken personal form — this a fragment of Blake’s philosophy. It was in the possession of an old clergyman when a certain jockey called upon him, and the cardinal virtues, confused between jockey and clergyman, devoted themselves to the jockey. As whenever he sinned a cardinal virtue interfered and turned him back to virtue, he lived in great credit, and made, but for one sentence, a very holy death. As his wife and family knelt round in admiration and grief he suddenly said “damn.” “O my dear,” said his wife, “what a dreadful expression.” He answered, “I am going to heaven,” and straightway died. It was a long tale, for there were all the jockey’s vain attempts to sin, as well as all the adventures of the clergyman, who became very sinful indeed, but it ended happily for when the jockey died the

cardinal virtues returned to the clergyman. I think he would talk to any audience that offered, one audience being the same as another in his eyes, and it may have been for this reason that my father called him unambitious. When he was a young man he had befriended a reformed thief and had asked the grateful thief to take him round the thieves' quarters of London. The thief, however, hurried him away from the worst saying, "Another minute and they would have found you out. If they were not the stupidest of men in London, they had done so already." Ellis had gone through a detailed, romantic and witty account of all the houses he had robbed and all the throats he had cut in one short life.

His conversation would often pass out of my comprehension, or indeed I think of any man's, into a labyrinth of abstraction and subtlety and then suddenly return with some verbal conceit or turn of wit. The mind is known to attain in certain conditions of trance a quickness so extraordinary that we are compelled at times to imagine a condition of unendurable intellectual intensity from which we are saved by the merciful stupidity of the body, and I think that the mind of Edwin Ellis was constantly upon the edge of trance. Once we were discussing the symbolism of sex in the philosophy of Blake and had been in disagreement all the afternoon. I began talking with a new sense of conviction and after a moment Ellis, who was at his easel, threw down his brush and said that he had just seen the same explanation in a series of symbolic visions. "In another moment," he said, "I should have been off." We went into the open air and walked up and down to get rid of that feeling, but presently we came in again and I began again my explanation, Ellis lying upon the sofa. I had been talking some time when Mrs Ellis came into the room and said, "Why are you sitting in the dark?" Ellis answered, "But we are not," and then added in a voice of wonder, "I thought the lamp was lit, and that I was sitting up, and now I find that I am

lying down and that we are in darkness." I had seen a flicker of light over the ceiling but thought it a reflection from some light outside the house, which may have been the case.

XVII

I had already met most of the poets of my generation. I had said, soon after the publication of *The Wanderings of Usheen*, to the editor of a series of shilling reprints, who had set me to compile tales of the Irish fairies, "I am growing jealous of other poets and we will all grow jealous of each other unless we know each other and so feel a share in each other's triumph." He was a Welshman, lately a mining engineer, Ernest Rhys, a writer of Welsh translations and original poems, that have often moved me greatly though I can think of no one else who has read them. He was perhaps a dozen years older than myself and through his work as editor knew everybody who would compile a book for seven or eight pounds. Between us we founded The Rhymers' Club, which for some years was to meet every night in an upper room with a sanded floor in an ancient eating house in the Strand called The Cheshire Cheese. Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Victor Plarr, Ernest Radford, John Davidson, Richard le Gallienne, T. W. Rolleston, Selwyn Image, Edwin Ellis, and John Todhunter came constantly for a time, Arthur Symons and Herbert Home, less constantly, while William Watson joined but never came and Francis Thompson came once but never joined; and sometimes if we met in a private house, which we did occasionally, Oscar Wilde came. It had been useless to invite him to The Cheshire Cheese for he hated Bohemia. "Olive Schreiner," he said once to me, "is staying in the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks upon their faces, but I have

told her that I live in the West End because nothing in life interests me but the mask."

We read our poems to one another and talked criticism and drank a little wine. I sometimes say when I speak of the club, "We had such and such ideas, such and such a quarrel with the great Victorians, we set before us such and such aims," as though we had many philosophical ideas. I say this because I am ashamed to admit that I had these ideas and that whenever I began to talk of them a gloomy silence fell upon the room. A young Irish poet, who wrote excellently but had the worst manners, was to say a few years later, "You do not talk like a poet, you talk like a man of letters," and if all the Rhymers had not been polite, if most of them had not been to Oxford or Cambridge, the greater number would have said the same thing. I was full of thought, often very abstract thought, longing all the while to be full of images, because I had gone to the art school instead of a university. Yet even if I had gone to a university, and learned all the classical foundations of English literature and English culture, all that great erudition which once accepted frees the mind from restlessness, I should have had to give up my Irish subject matter, or attempt to found a new tradition. Lacking sufficient recognized precedent I must needs find out some reason for all I did. I knew almost from the start that to overflow with reasons was to be not quite well-born, and when I could I hid them, as men hide a disagreeable ancestry; and that there was no help for it seeing that my country was not born at all. I was of those doomed to imperfect achievement, and under a curse, as it were, like some race of birds compelled to spend the time, needed for the making of the nest, in argument as to the convenience of moss and twig and lichen. Le Gallienne and Davidson, and even Symons, were provincial at their setting out, but their provincialism was curable, mine incurable; while the one conviction shared

by all the younger men, but principally by Johnson and Home, who imposed their personalities upon us, was an opposition to all ideas, all generalizations that can be explained and debated. E — — fresh from Paris would sometimes say — "We are concerned with nothing but impressions," but that itself was a generalization and met but stony silence. Conversation constantly dwindled into "Do you like so and so's last book?" "No, I prefer the book before it," and I think that but for its Irish members, who said whatever came into their heads, the club would not have survived its first difficult months. I saw — now ashamed that I saw "like a man of letters," now exasperated at their indifference to the fashion of their own river-bed — that Swinburne in one way, Browning in another, and Tennyson in a third, had filled their work with what I called "impurities," curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion; and that we must create once more the pure work.

Our clothes were, for the most part unadventurous like our conversation, though I indeed wore a brown velveteen coat, a loose tie, and a very old inverness cape, discarded by my father twenty years before and preserved by my Sligo-born mother whose actions were unreasoning and habitual like the seasons. But no other member of the club, except Le Gallienne, who wore a loose tie, and Symons, who had an inverness cape that was quite new and almost fashionable, would have shown himself for the world in any costume but "that of an English gentleman." "One should be quite unnoticeable," Johnson explained to me. Those who conformed most carefully to the fashion in their clothes, generally departed furthest from it in their handwriting, which was small, neat, and studied, one poet — which, I forget — having founded his upon the handwriting of George Herbert. Dowson and Symons I was to know better in later years when Symons became a very dear friend, and I never got behind John Davidson's

Scottish roughness and exasperation, though I saw much of him, but from the first I devoted myself to Lionel Johnson. He and Horne and Image and one or two others, shared a man-servant and an old house in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, typical figures of transition, doing as an achievement of learning and of exquisite taste what their predecessors did in careless abundance. All were Pre-Raphaelite, and sometimes one might meet in the rooms of one or other a ragged figure, as of some fallen dynasty, Simeon Solomon the Pre-Raphaelite painter, once the friend of Rossetti and of Swinburne, but fresh now from some low public house. Condemned to a long term of imprisonment for a criminal offence, he had sunk into drunkenness and misery. Introduced one night, however, to some man who mistook him, in the dim candle light, for another Solomon, a successful academic painter and R.A., he started to his feet in a rage with, “Sir, do you dare to mistake me for that mountebank?” Though not one had hearkened to the feeblest caw, or been spattered by the smallest dropping from any Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, Bastien-Lepage bundle of old twigs I began by suspecting them of lukewarmness, and even backsliding, and I owe it to that suspicion that I never became intimate with Horne, who lived to become the greatest English authority upon Italian life in the fourteenth century and to write the one standard work on Botticelli. Connoisseur in several arts, he had designed a little church in the manner of Inigo Jones for a burial ground near the Marble Arch. Though I now think his little church a masterpiece, its style was more than a century too late to hit my fancy, at two or three and twenty; and I accused him of leaning towards that eighteenth century

“That taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit

Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
Their verses tallied."

Another fanaticism delayed my friendship with two men, who are now my friends and in certain matters my chief instructors. Somebody, probably Lionel Johnson, brought me to the studio of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, certainly heirs of the great generation, and the first thing I saw was a Shannon picture of a lady and child, arrayed in lace silk and satin, suggesting that hated century. My eyes were full of some more mythological mother and child and I would have none of it and I told Shannon that he had not painted a mother and child, but elegant people expecting visitors and I thought that a great reproach. Somebody writing in *The Germ* had said that a picture of a pheasant and an apple was merely a picture of something to eat and I was so angry with the indifference to subject, which was the commonplace of all art criticism since Bastien-Lepage, that I could at times see nothing else but subject. I thought that, though it might not matter to the man himself whether he loved a white woman or a black, a female pickpocket or a regular communicant of the Church of England, if only he loved strongly, it certainly did matter to his relations and even under some circumstances to his whole neighbourhood. Sometimes indeed, like some father in Molière, I ignored the lover's feelings altogether and even refused to admit that a trace of the devil, perhaps a trace of colour, may lend piquancy, especially if the connection be not permanent.

Among these men, of whom so many of the greatest talents were to live such passionate lives and die such tragic deaths, one serene man, T. W. Rolleston, seemed always out of place; it was I brought him there, intending to set him to some work in Ireland later on. I have known young Dublin working men slip out of their workshop to see the second Thomas Davis

passing by, and even remember a conspiracy, by some three or four, to make him “the leader of the Irish race at home and abroad,” and all because he had regular features; and when all is said Alexander the Great and Alcibiades were personable men, and the Founder of the Christian religion was the only man who was neither a little too tall nor a little too short, but exactly six feet high. We in Ireland thought as do the plays and ballads, not understanding that, from the first moment wherein nature foresaw the birth of Bastien-Lepage, she has only granted great creative power to men whose faces are contorted with extravagance or curiosity, or dulled with some protecting stupidity.

I had now met all those who were to make the ‘nineties of the last century tragic in the history of literature, but as yet we were all seemingly equal, whether in talent or in luck, and scarce even personalties to one another. I remember saying one night at the Cheshire Cheese, when more poets than usual had come, “None of us can say who will succeed, or even who has or has not talent. The only thing certain about us is that we are too many.”

XVIII

I have described what image — always opposite to the natural self or the natural world — Wilde, Henley, Morris, copied or tried to copy, but I have not said if I found an image for myself. I know very little about myself and much less of that anti-self: probably the woman who cooks my dinner or the woman who sweeps out my study knows more than I. It is perhaps because nature made me a gregarious man, going hither and thither looking for conversation, and ready to deny from fear or favour his dearest conviction, that I love proud and lonely things. When I was a child and

went daily to the sexton's daughter for writing lessons, I found one poem in her School Reader that delighted me beyond all others: a fragment of some metrical translation from Aristophanes wherein the birds sing scorn upon mankind. In later years my mind gave itself to gregarious Shelley's dream of a young man, his hair blanched with sorrow, studying philosophy in some lonely tower, or of his old man, master of all human knowledge, hidden from human sight in some shell-strewn cavern on the Mediterranean shore. One passage above all ran perpetually in my ears —

"Some feign that he is Enoch: others dream
He was pre-Adamite, and has survived
Cycles of generation and of ruin.
The sage, in truth, by dreadful abstinence,
And conquering penance of the mutinous flesh,
Deep contemplation and unwearied study,
In years outstretched beyond the date of man,
May have attained to sovereignty and science
Over those strong and secret things and thoughts
Which others fear and know not.
Mahmud. I would talk
With this old Jew.
Hassan. Thy will is even now
Made known to him where he dwells in a sea-cavern
'Mid the Demonesi, less accessible
Than thou or God! He who would question him
Must sail alone at sunset where the stream
Of ocean sleeps around those foamless isles,
When the young moon is westering as now,
And evening airs wander upon the wave;

And, when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle,
Green Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow
Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water,
Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud
'Ahasuerus!' and the caverns round
Will answer 'Ahasuerus!' If his prayer
Be granted, a faint meteor will arise,
Lighting him over Marmora; and a wind
Will rush out of the sighing pine-forest,
And with the wind a storm of harmony
Unutterably sweet, and pilot him
Through the soft twilight to the Bosphorus:
Thence, at the hour and place and circumstance
Fit for the matter of their conference,
The Jew appears. Few dare, and few who dare
Win the desired communion."

Already in Dublin, I had been attracted to the Theosophists because they had affirmed the real existence of the Jew, or of his like, and, apart from whatever might have been imagined by Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, and Bastien-Lepage, I saw nothing against his reality. Presently having heard that Madame Blavatsky had arrived from France, or from India, I thought it time to look the matter up. Certainly if wisdom existed anywhere in the world it must be in some such lonely mind admitting no duty to us, communing with God only, conceding nothing from fear or favour. Have not all peoples, while bound together in a single mind and taste, believed that such men existed and paid them that honour, or paid it to their mere shadow, which they have refused to philanthropists and to men of learning.

XIX

I found Madame Blavatsky in a little house at Norwood, with but, as she said, three followers left — the Society of Psychical Research had just reported on her Indian phenomena — and as one of the three followers sat in an outer room to keep out undesirable visitors, I was kept a long time kicking my heels. Presently I was admitted and found an old woman in a plain loose dark dress: a sort of old Irish peasant woman with an air of humour and audacious power. I was still kept waiting, for she was deep in conversation with a woman visitor. I strayed through folding doors into the next room and stood, in sheer idleness of mind, looking at a cuckoo clock. It was certainly stopped, for the weights were off and lying upon the ground, and yet, as I stood there the cuckoo came out and cuckooed at me. I interrupted Madame Blavatsky to say, "Your clock has hooted me." "It oftens hoots at a stranger," she replied. "Is there a spirit in it?" I said. "I do not know," she said, "I should have to be alone to know what is in it." I went back to the clock and began examining it and heard her say: "Do not break my clock." I wondered if there was some hidden mechanism and I should have been put out, I suppose, had I found any, though Henley had said to me, "Of course she gets up fraudulent miracles, but a person of genius has to do something; Sarah Bernhardt sleeps in her coffin." Presently the visitor went away and Madame Blavatsky explained that she was a propagandist for women's rights who had called to find out "why men were so bad." "What explanation did you give her?" I said. "That men were born bad, but women made themselves so," and then she explained that I had been kept waiting because she had mistaken me for some man, whose name resembled mine and who wanted to persuade her of the flatness of the earth.

When I next saw her she had moved into a house at Holland Park, and some time must have passed — probably I had been in Sligo where I

returned constantly for long visits — for she was surrounded by followers. She sat nightly before a little table covered with green baize and on this green baize she scribbled constantly with a piece of white chalk. She would scribble symbols, sometimes humorously explained, and sometimes unintelligible figures, but the chalk was intended to mark down her score when she played patience. One saw in the next room a large table where every night her followers and guests, often a great number, sat down to their vegetable meal, while she encouraged or mocked through the folding doors. A great passionate nature, a sort of female Dr Johnson, impressive I think to every man or woman who had themselves any richness, she seemed impatient of the formalism of the shrill abstract idealism of those about her, and this impatience broke out in railing and many nicknames: "O you are a flap-doodle, but then you are a theosophist and a brother." The most devout and learned of all her followers said to me, "H. P. B. has just told me that there is another globe stuck on to this at the north pole, so that the earth has really a shape something like a dumb-bell." I said, for I knew that her imagination contained all the folklore of the world, "That must be some piece of Eastern mythology." "O no it is not," he said, "of that I am certain, and there must be something in it or she would not have said it." Her mockery was not kept for her followers alone, and her voice would become harsh, and her mockery lose fantasy and humour, when she spoke of what seemed to her scientific materialism. Once I saw this antagonism, guided by some kind of telepathic divination, take a form of brutal fantasy. I brought a very able Dublin woman to see her and this woman had a brother, a physiologist whose reputation, though known to specialists alone, was European, and because of this brother a family pride in everything scientific and modern. The Dublin woman scarcely opened her mouth the whole evening and her name was certainly unknown to Madame Blavatsky, yet I

saw at once in that wrinkled old face bent over the cards, and the only time I ever saw it there, a personal hostility, the dislike of one woman for another. Madame Blavatsky seemed to bundle herself up, becoming all primeval peasant, and began complaining of her ailments, more especially of her bad leg. But of late her master — her "old Jew," her "Ahasuerus" — cured it, or set it on the way to be cured. "I was sitting here in my chair," said she, "when the master came in and brought something with him which he put over my knee, something warm which enclosed my knee — it was a live dog which he had cut open." I recognized a cure used sometimes in mediaeval medicine. She had two masters and their portraits, ideal Indian heads, painted by some most incompetent artist, stood upon either side of the folding doors. One night when talk was impersonal and general, I sat gazing through the folding doors into the dimly lighted dining room beyond. I noticed a curious red light shining upon a picture and got up to see where the red light came from. It was the picture of an Indian and as I came near it slowly vanished. When I returned to my seat, Madame Blavatsky said, "What did you see?" "A picture," I said. "Tell it to go away." "It is already gone." "So much the better," she said, "I was afraid it was mediumship. But it is only clairvoyance." "What is the difference?" "If it had been mediumship, it would have stayed in spite of you. Beware of mediumship; it is a kind of madness; I know for I have been through it."

I found her almost always full of gaiety that, unlike the occasional joking of those about her, was illogical and incalculable and yet always kindly and tolerant. I had called one evening to find her absent but expected every moment. She had been somewhere at the seaside for her health and arrived with a little suite of followers. She sat down at once in her big chair, and began unfolding a brown paper parcel while all looked on full of curiosity. It contained a large family Bible. "This is a present for my maid," she said.

“What a Bible and not even annotated!” said some shocked voice. “Well, my children,” was the answer, “what is the good of giving lemons to those who want oranges?” When I first began to frequent her house, as I soon did very constantly, I noticed a handsome clever woman of the world there, who seemed certainly very much out of place, penitent though she thought herself. Presently there was much scandal and gossip for the penitent was plainly entangled with two young men, who were expected to grow into ascetic sages. The scandal was so great that Madame Blavatsky had to call the penitent before her and to speak after this fashion, “We think that it is necessary to crush the animal nature; you should live in chastity in act and thought. Initiation is granted only to those who are entirely chaste,” and so it ran on for some time. However, after some minutes in that vehement style, the penitent standing crushed and shamed before her, she had wound up, “I cannot permit you more than one.” She was quite sincere but thought that nothing mattered but what happened in the mind, and that if we could not master the mind our actions were of little importance. One young man filled her with exasperation for she thought that his settled gloom came from his chastity. I had known him in Dublin where he had been accustomed to interrupt long periods of asceticism, in which he would eat vegetables and drink water, with brief outbreaks of what he considered the devil. After an outbreak he would for a few hours dazzle the imagination of the members of the local theosophical society with poetical rhapsodies about harlots and street lamps, and then sink into weeks of melancholy. A fellow-theosophist once found him hanging from the windowpole, but cut him down in the nick of time. I said to the man who cut him down, “What did you say to each other?” He said, “We spent the night telling comic stories and laughing a great deal.” This man, torn between sensuality and visionary ambition, was now the most devout of all, and told me that in the

middle of the night he could often hear the ringing of the little “astral bell” whereby Madame Blavatsky’s master called her attention, and that, although it was a silvery low tone, it made the whole house shake. Another night I found him waiting in the hall to show in those who had right of entrance, on some night when the discussion was private, and as I passed he whispered into my ear, “Madame Blavatsky is perhaps not a real woman at all. They say that her dead body was found many years ago upon some Russian battlefield.” She had two dominant moods, both of extreme activity, one calm and philosophic, and this was the mood always on that night in the week when she answered questions upon her system, and as I look back after thirty years I often ask myself, “Was her speech automatic? Was she a trance medium, or in some similar state, one night in every week?” In the other mood she was full of fantasy and inconsequent raillery. “That is the Greek Church, a triangle like all true religion,” I recall her saying, as she chalked out a triangle on the green baize, and then as she made it disappear in meaningless scribbles, “it spread out and became a bramble bush like the Church of Rome.” Then rubbing it all out except one straight line, “Now they have lopped off the branches and turned it into a broomstick and that is protestantism.” And so it was night after night always varied and unforeseen. I have observed a like sudden extreme change in others, half whose thought was supernatural and Lawrence Oliphant records somewhere or other like observations. I can remember only once finding her in a mood of reverie, something had happened to damp her spirits, some attack upon her movement, or upon herself. She spoke of Balzac, whom she had seen but once, of Alfred de Musset, whom she had known well enough to dislike for his morbidity, and George Sand, whom she had known so well that they had dabbled in magic together of which “neither knew anything at all” in those days; and she ran on, as if

there was nobody there to overhear her, “I used to wonder at and pity the people who sell their souls to the devil, but now I only pity them. They do it to have somebody on their side,” and added to that, after some words I have forgotten, “I write, write, write as the Wandering Jew walks, walks, walks.”

Besides the devotees, who came to listen and to turn every doctrine into a new sanction for the puritanical convictions of their Victorian childhood, cranks came from half Europe and from all America, and they came that they might talk. One American said to me, “She has become the most famous woman in the world by sitting in a big chair and permitting us to talk.” They talked and she played patience, and totted up her score on the green baize, and generally seemed to listen, but sometimes she would listen no more. There was a woman who talked perpetually of “the divine spark” within her, until Madame Blavatsky stopped her with — “Yes, my dear, you have a divine spark within you and if you are not very careful you will hear it snore.” A certain Salvation Army captain probably pleased her, for if vociferous and loud of voice, he had much animation. He had known hardship and spoke of his visions while starving in the streets and he was still perhaps a little light in the head. I wondered what he could preach to ignorant men, his head ablaze with wild mysticism, till I met a man who had heard him talking near Covent Garden to some crowd in the street. “My friends,” he was saying, “you have the kingdom of heaven within you and it would take a pretty big pill to get that out.”

Meanwhile I had got no nearer to proving that the sage Ahasuerus “dwells in a sea cavern ‘mid the Demonesi,” nor did I learn any more of those “Masters” whose representative Madame Blavatsky claimed to be. All there seemed to feel their presence, and all spoke of them as if they were more important than any visible inhabitant of the house. When Madame Blavatsky was more silent, less vivid than usual, it was “because her

Masters were angry;" they had rebuked her because of some error, and she professed constant error. Once I seemed in their presence, or that of some messenger of theirs. It was about nine at night, and half a dozen of us sat round her big table cloth, when the room seemed to fill with the odour of incense. Somebody came from upstairs, but could smell nothing — had been outside the influence it seems — but to myself and the others, it was very strong. Madame Blavatsky said it was a common Indian incense, and that some pupil of her master's was present; she seemed anxious to make light of the matter and turned the conversation to something else. Certainly it was a romantic house, and I did not separate myself from it by my own will. I had learned from Blake to hate all abstraction, and, affected by the abstraction of what were called "esoteric teachings," I began a series of experiments. Some book or magazine published by the society had quoted from that essay of magic, which Sibley, the eighteenth century astrologer, had bound up with his big book upon astrology. If you burnt a flower to ashes and put the ashes under, I think, the receiver of an air pump, and stood the receiver in the moonlight for so many nights, the ghost of the flower would appear hovering over its ashes. I got together a committee which performed this experiment without results. The "esoteric teachings" had declared that a certain very pure kind of indigo was the symbol of one of the seven principles into which they divided human nature. I got with some difficulty a little of this pure indigo, and gave portions of it to members of the committee, and asked them to put it under their pillows at night and record their dreams. I argued that all natural scenery must be divided into seven types according to these principles, and by their study we could rid the mind of abstraction. Presently a secretary, a friendly, intelligent man, asked me to come and see him, and, when I did, complained that I was causing discussion and disturbance. A certain

fanatical hungry face had been noticed red and tearful, and it was quite plain that I was not in agreement with their methods or their philosophy. “We have certain definite ideas,” he said, “and we have but one duty, to spread them through the world. I know that all these people become dogmatic, that they believe what they can never prove, that their withdrawal from family life is for them a great misfortune, but what are we to do? We have been told that all spiritual influx into the society will come to an end in 1897 for exactly one hundred years; before that date our fundamental ideas must be spread in all countries.” I knew the doctrine, and it made me wonder why that old woman, or the “masters” from whom, whatever they were or were not, her genius had come, insisted upon it; for influx of some kind there must always be. Did they dread heresy, or had they no purpose but the greatest possible immediate effect?

XX

At the British Museum reading room I often saw a man of thirty-six, or thirty-seven, in a brown velveteen coat, with a gaunt resolute face, and an athletic body, who seemed before I heard his name, or knew the nature of his studies, a figure of romance. Presently I was introduced, where or by what man or woman I do not remember. He was called Liddle Mathers, but would soon, under the touch of “The Celtic Movement,” become Macgregor Mathers, and then plain Macgregor. He was the author of *The Kabbala Unveiled*, and his studies were two only — magic and the theory of war, for he believed himself a born commander and all but equal in wisdom and in power to that old Jew. He had copied many manuscripts on magic ceremonial and doctrine in the British Museum, and was to copy many more in Continental libraries, and it was through him mainly that I

began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory. I believe that his mind in those early days did not belie his face and body, though in later years it became unhinged, for he kept a proud head amid great poverty. One that boxed with him nightly has told me that for many weeks he could knock him down, though Mathers was the stronger man, and only knew long after that during those weeks Mathers starved. With him I met an old white-haired Oxfordshire clergyman, the most panic-stricken person I have ever known, though Mathers' introduction had been "he unites us to the great adepts of antiquity." This old man took me aside that he might say — "I hope you never invoke spirits — that is a very dangerous thing to do. I am told that even the planetary spirits turn upon us in the end." I said, "Have you ever seen an apparition?" "O yes, once," he said. "I have my alchemical laboratory in a cellar under my house where the Bishop cannot see it. One day I was walking up and down there when I heard another footstep walking up and down beside me. I turned and saw a girl I had been in love with when I was a young man, but she died long ago. She wanted me to kiss her. O no, I would not do that." "Why not?" I said. "O she might have got power over me." "Has your alchemical research had any success?" I said. "Yes, I once made the elixir of life. A French alchemist said it had the right smell and the right colour" (the alchemist may have been Eliphas Levi, who visited England in the 'sixties, and would have said anything) "but the first effect of the elixir is that your nails fall out and your hair falls off. I was afraid that I might have made a mistake and that nothing else might happen, so I put it away on a shelf. I meant to drink it when I was an old man, but when I got it down the other day it had all dried up."

Soon after my first meeting with Mathers he emerged into brief prosperity, becoming for two or three years Curator of a private museum at Forest Hill, and marrying a young and beautiful wife, the sister of the philosopher, Henri Bergson. His house at Forest Hill was soon a romantic place to a little group, Florence Farr, myself, and some dozen fellow students. I think that it was she, her curiosity being insatiable, who first brought news of that house and that she brought it in mockery and in wonder. Mathers had taken her for a walk through a field of sheep and had said, "Look at the sheep. I am going to imagine myself a ram," and at once all the sheep ran after him; another day he had tried to quell a thunder storm by making symbols in the air with a masonic sword, but the storm had not been quelled; and then came the crowning wonder. He had given her a piece of cardboard on which was a coloured geometrical symbol and had told her to hold it to her forehead and she had found herself walking upon a cliff above the sea, seagulls shrieking overhead. I did not think the ram story impossible, and even tried half a dozen times to excite a cat by imagining a mouse in front of its nose, but still some chance movement of the flock might have deceived her. But what could have deceived her in that final marvel? Then another brought a like report, and presently my own turn came. He gave me a cardboard symbol and I closed my eyes. Sight came slowly, there was not that sudden miracle as if the darkness had been cut with a knife, for that miracle is mostly a woman's privilege, but there rose before me mental images that I could not control: a desert and black Titan raising himself up by his two hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins. Mathers explained that I had seen a being of the order of Salamanders because he had shown me their symbol, but it was not necessary even to show the symbol, it would have been sufficient that he imagined it. I had already written in my diary, under some date in 1887, that Madame

Blavatsky's Masters were "trance personalities," and I must have meant such beings as my black Titan, only more lasting and more powerful. I had found when a boy in Dublin on a table in the Royal Irish Academy a pamphlet on Japanese art and read there of an animal painter so remarkable that horses he had painted upon a Temple wall, had slipped down after dark and trampled the neighbours' fields of rice. Somebody had come into the temple in the early morning, had been startled by a shower of water drops, had looked up and seen painted horses still wet from the dew-covered fields, but now "trembling into stillness."

I had soon mastered Mathers' symbolic system, and discovered that for a considerable minority — whom I could select by certain unanalysable characteristics — the visible world would completely vanish, and that world, summoned by the symbol, take its place. One day when alone in a third-class carriage, in the very middle of the railway bridge that crosses the Thames near Victoria, I smelt incense. I was on my way to Forest Hill; might it not come from some spirit Mathers had called up? I had wondered when I smelt it at Madame Blavatsky's — if there might be some contrivance, some secret censer, but that explanation was no longer possible. I believed that Salamander of his but an image, and presently I found analogies between smell and image. It must be from thought but what certainty had I, that what had taken me by surprise, could be from my own thought, and if a thought could affect the sense of smell, why not the sense of touch? Then I discovered among that group of students that surrounded Macgregor, a man who had fought a cat in his dreams and awaked to find his breast covered with scratches. Was there an impassable barrier between those scratches and the trampled fields of rice? It would seem so, and yet all was uncertainty. What fixed law would our experiments leave to our imagination?

Mathers had learning but no scholarship, much imagination and imperfect taste, but if he made some absurd statement, some incredible claim, some hackneyed joke, we would half consciously change claim, statement or joke, as though he were a figure in a play of our composition. He was a necessary extravagance, and he had carried further than anyone else, a claim implicit in the romantic movement from the time of Shelley and of Goethe; and in body and in voice at least he was perfect; so might Faust have looked at the end of his hundred years. In the credulity of our youth we secretly wondered if he had not met with, perhaps even been taught by some old man who had found the elixir. Nor did he undeceive us. "If you find the elixir," he was accustomed to say, "you always look a few years younger than the age at which you found it. If you find it at sixty you will look fifty for a hundred years." None of us would have admitted that we believed in stone or elixir, the old Oxfordshire clergyman excited no belief, yet one among us certainly laboured with crucible or athanor. Ten years ago I called upon an elderly solicitor, on some business, but at his private house, and I remembered whose pupil he had been when I found among the ashes of the hearth a little earthen pot. He pretended that he studied alchemy that he might some day write its history, and I found when I questioned others, that for twenty years there had been just such a little pot among the ashes.

XXI

I generalized a great deal and was ashamed of it. I thought it was my business in life to be an artist and a poet, and that there could be no business comparable to that. I refused to read books and even to meet people who excited me to generalization, all to no purpose. I said my prayers much as in

childhood, though without the old regularity of hour and place, and I began to pray that my imagination might somehow be rescued from abstraction and became as preoccupied with life as had been the imagination of Chaucer. For ten or twelve years more I suffered continual remorse, and only became content when my abstractions had composed themselves into picture and dramatization. My very remorse helped to spoil my early poetry, giving it an element of sentimentality through my refusal to permit it any share of an intellect which I considered impure. Even in practical life I only very gradually began to use generalizations, that have since become the foundation of all I have done, or shall do, in Ireland. For all I know all men may have been so timid, for I am persuaded that our intellects at twenty contain all the truths we shall ever find, but as yet we do not know truths that belong to us from opinions, caught up in casual irritation or momentary fantasy. As life goes on we discover that certain thoughts sustain us in defeat, or give us victory, whether over ourselves or others, and it is these thoughts, tested by passion, that we call convictions. Among subjective men (in all those, that is, who must spin a web out of their own bowels) the victory is an intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away, and so that fate's antithesis; while what I have called "the Mask" is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of their internal nature. We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.

XXII

A conviction that the world was now but a bundle of fragments possessed me without ceasing. I had tried this conviction on the Rhymers, thereby plunging into greater silence an already too silent evening. "Johnson," I was accustomed to say, "you are the only man I know whose

silence has beak and claw." I had lectured on it to some London Irish society, and I was to lecture upon it later on in Dublin, but I never found but one interested man, an official of the Primrose League, who was also an active member of the Fenian Brotherhood. "I am an extreme conservative apart from Ireland," I have heard him explain; and I have no doubt that personal experience made him share the sight of any eye that saw the world in fragments. I had been put into a rage by the followers of Huxley, Tyndall, Carolus Duran, and Bastien-Lepage, who not only asserted the unimportance of subject whether in art or literature, but the independence of the arts from one another. Upon the other hand, I delighted in every age where poet and artist confined themselves gladly to some inherited subject matter known to the whole people, for I thought that in man and race alike there is something called "Unity of Being," using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the *Convito* to a perfectly proportioned human body. My father, from whom I had learned the term, preferred a comparison to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string all the strings murmur faintly. There is not more desire, he had said, in lust than in true love, but in true love desire awakens pity, hope, affection, admiration, and, given appropriate circumstance, every emotion possible to man. When I began, however, to apply this thought to the state and to argue for a law-made balance among trades and occupations my father displayed at once the violent free trader and propagandist of liberty. I thought that the enemy of this unity was abstraction, meaning by abstraction not the distinction but the isolation of occupation, or class or faculty —

"Call down the hawk from the air
Let him be hooded, or caged,
Till the yellow eye has grown mild,
For larder and spit are bare,

The old cook enraged,
The scullion gone wild."

I knew no mediaeval cathedral, and Westminster, being a part of abhorred London, did not interest me, but I thought constantly of Homer and Dante, and the tombs of Mausolus and Artemisia, the great figures of King and Queen and the lesser figures of Greek and Amazon, Centaur and Greek. I thought that all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and its strong legs. I got great pleasure too from remembering that Homer was sung, and from that tale of Dante hearing a common man sing some stanza from *The Divine Comedy*, and from Don Quixote's meeting with some common man that sang Ariosto. Morris had never seemed to care greatly for any poet later than Chaucer and though I preferred Shakespeare to Chaucer I begrudged my own preference. Had not Europe shared one mind and heart, until both mind and heart began to break into fragments a little before Shakespeare's birth? Music and verse began to fall apart when Chaucer robbed verse of its speed that he might give it greater meditation, though for another generation or so minstrels were to sing his lengthy elaborated *Troilus and Criseyde*; painting parted from religion in the later Renaissance that it might study effects of tangibility undisturbed; while, that it might characterize, where it had once personified, it renounced, in our own age, all that inherited subject matter which we have named poetry. Presently I was indeed to number character itself among the abstractions, encouraged by Congreve's saying that "passions are too powerful in the fair sex to let humour," or as we say character, "have its course." Nor have we fared better under the common daylight, for pure reason has notoriously made but light of practical reason, and has been made light of in its turn from that morning when Descartes discovered that he could think better in his bed than out of it; nor needed I original thought to discover, being so

late of the school of Morris, that machinery had not separated from handicraft wholly for the world's good, nor to notice that the distinction of classes had become their isolation. If the London merchants of our day competed together in writing lyrics they would not, like the Tudor merchants, dance in the open street before the house of the victor; nor do the great ladies of London finish their balls on the pavement before their doors as did the great Venetian ladies, even in the eighteenth century, conscious of an all enfolding sympathy. Doubtless because fragments broke into ever smaller fragments we saw one another in a light of bitter comedy, and in the arts, where now one technical element reigned and now another, generation hated generation, and accomplished beauty was snatched away when it had most engaged our affections. One thing I did not foresee, not having the courage of my own thought: the growing murderousness of the world.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

XXIII

If abstraction had reached, or all but reached its climax, escape might be possible for many, and if it had not, individual men might still escape. If

Chaucer's personages had disengaged themselves from Chaucer's crowd, forgot their common goal and shrine, and after sundry magnifications became each in turn the centre of some Elizabethan play, and had after split into their elements and so given birth to romantic poetry, must I reverse the cinematograph? I thought that the general movement of literature must be such a reversal, men being there displayed in casual, temporary, contact as at the Tabard door. I had lately read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and thought that where his theoretical capacity had not awakened there was such a turning back: but a nation or an individual with great emotional intensity might follow the pilgrims as it were to some unknown shrine, and give to all those separated elements and to all that abstract love and melancholy, a symbolical, a mythological coherence. Not Chaucer's rough tongued riders, but rather an ended pilgrimage, a procession of the Gods! Arthur Symons brought back from Paris stories of Verhaeren and Maeterlinck, and so brought me confirmation, as I thought, and I began to announce a poetry like that of the Sufi's. I could not endure, however, an international art, picking stories and symbols where it pleased. Might I not, with health and good luck to aid me, create some new *Prometheus Unbound*; Patrick or Columbkil, Oisin or Fion, in Prometheus' stead; and, instead of Caucasus, Cro-Patric or Ben Bulben? Have not all races had their first unity from a polytheism, that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called "the applied arts of literature," the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? Perhaps even these images, once created and associated with river

and mountain, might move of themselves and with some powerful, even turbulent life, like those painted horses that trampled the rice fields of Japan.

XXIV

I used to tell the few friends to whom I could speak these secret thoughts that I would make the attempt in Ireland but fail, for our civilization, its elements multiplying by division like certain low forms of life, was all-powerful; but in reality I had the wildest hopes. To-day I add to that first conviction, to that first desire for unity, this other conviction, long a mere opinion vaguely or intermittently apprehended: Nations, races, and individual men are unified by an image, or bundle of related images, symbolical or evocative of the state of mind, which is of all states of mind not impossible, the most difficult to that man, race, or nation; because only the greatest obstacle that can be contemplated without despair, rouses the will to full intensity.

A powerful class by terror, rhetoric, and organized sentimentality, may drive their people to war but the day draws near when they cannot keep them there; and how shall they face the pure nations of the East when the day comes to do it with but equal arms? I had seen Ireland in my own time turn from the bragging rhetoric and gregarious humour of O'Connell's generation and school, and offer herself to the solitary and proud Parnell as to her anti-self, buskin following hard on sock, and I had begun to hope, or to half hope, that we might be the first in Europe to seek unity as deliberately as it had been sought by theologian, poet, sculptor, architect, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Doubtless we must seek it differently, no longer considering it convenient to epitomize all human

knowledge, but find it we well might could we first find philosophy and a little passion.

BOOK II: IRELAND AFTER THE FALL OF PARNELL

I

A couple of years before the death of Parnell, I had wound up my introduction to those selections from the Irish novelists with the prophecy of an intellectual movement at the first lull in politics, and now I wished to fulfil my prophecy. I did not put it in that way, for I preferred to think that the sudden emotion that now came to me, the sudden certainty that Ireland was to be like soft wax for years to come, was a moment of supernatural insight. How could I tell, how can I tell even now?

There was a little Irish Society of young people, clerks, shop boys, and shop girls, called "The Southwark Irish Literary Society," and it had ceased to meet because the girls got the giggles when any member of the Committee got up to speak. Every member of it had said all he had to say many times over. I had given them a lecture about the falling asunder of the human mind, as an opening flower falls asunder, and all had professed admiration because I had made such a long speech without quotation or narrative; and now I invited the Committee to my father's house at Bedford Park, and there proposed a new organization, "The Irish Literary Society." T. W. Rolleston came to that first meeting, and it was because he had much tact, and a knowledge of the technical business of committees, that a society was founded which was joined by every London-Irish author and journalist. In a few months somebody had written its history, and published that history, illustrated by our portraits, at a shilling. When it was published I was in Dublin, founding a society there called "The National Literary Society," and affiliating it with certain Young Ireland Societies in country towns which seemed anxious to accept its leadership. I had definite plans; I wanted to create an Irish Theatre; I was finishing my *Countess Cathleen* in

its first meagre version, and thought of a travelling company to visit our country branches; but before that there must be a popular imaginative literature. I arranged with Mr. Fisher Unwin and his reader, Mr Edward Garnett — a personal friend of mine — that when our organization was complete Mr Fisher Unwin was to publish for it a series of books at a shilling each. I told only one man of this arrangement, for after I had made my plans I heard an alarming rumour. Old Sir Charles Gavan Duffy was coming from Australia to start an Irish publishing house, and publish a series of books, and I did not expect to agree with him, but knew that I must not seek a quarrel. The two societies were necessary because their lectures must take the place of an educated popular press, which we had not, and have not now, and create a standard of criticism. Irish literature had fallen into contempt; no educated man ever bought an Irish book; in Dublin Professor Dowden, the one man of letters with an international influence, was accustomed to say that he knew an Irish book by its smell, because he had once seen some books whose binding had been fastened together by rotten glue; and Standish O'Grady's last book upon ancient Irish history — a book rather wild, rather too speculative, but forestalling later research — had not been reviewed by any periodical or newspaper in England or in Ireland.

At first I had great success, for I brought with me a list of names written down by some member of the Southwark Irish Literary Society, and for six weeks went hither and thither appealing and persuading. My first conversation was over a butter-tub in some Dublin back street, and the man agreed with me at once; everybody agreed with me; all felt that something must be done, but nobody knew what. Perhaps they did not understand me, perhaps I kept back my full thoughts, perhaps they only seemed to listen; it was enough that I had a plan, and was determined about it. When I went to

lecture in a provincial town, a workman's wife, who wrote patriotic stories in some weekly newspaper, invited me to her house, and I found all her children in their Sunday best. She made a little speech, very formal and very simple, in which she said that what she wrote had no merit, but that it paid for her children's schooling; and she finished her speech by telling her children never to forget that they had seen me. One man compared me to Thomas Davis, another said I could organise like Davitt, and I thought to succeed as they did, and as rapidly. I did not examine this applause, nor the true thoughts of those I met, nor the general condition of the country, but I examined myself a great deal, and was puzzled at myself. I knew that I was shy and timid, that I would often leave some business undone, or purchase unmade, because I shrank from facing a strange office or a shop a little grander than usual, and yet, here was I delightedly talking to strange people every day. It was many years before I understood that I had surrendered myself to the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil. Metrical composition is always very difficult to me, nothing is done upon the first day, not one rhyme is in its place; and when at last the rhymes begin to come, the first rough draft of a six-line stanza takes the whole day. At that time I had not formed a style, and sometimes a six-line stanza would take several days, and not seem finished even then; and I had not learnt, as I have now, to put it all out of my head before night, and so the last night was generally sleepless, and the last day a day of nervous strain. But now I had found the happiness that Shelley found when he tied a pamphlet to a fire balloon.

II

At first I asked no help from prominent persons, and when some clerk or shop-assistant would say "Dr So-and-so or Professor So-and-so will have nothing to do with us" I would answer, "When we prove we can gather sheep shepherds will come." Presently, come they did, old, middle-aged, or but little older than myself, but all with some authority in their town: John O'Leary, John F. Taylor, and Douglas Hyde, and Standish O'Grady, and of these much presently; Dr. Sigerson who has picked a quarrel with me and of whom I shall say nothing that he may not pick another; Count Plunkett, Sinn Feiner of late and Minister of Dail Eireann; Dr. Coffey, now head of the National University; George Coffey, later on Curator of the Irish Antiquities at the Museum of the Royal Dublin Society; Patrick J. McCall, poet and publican of Patrick Street, and later member of corporation; Richard Ashe King, novelist and correspondent of *Truth*, a gentle, intelligent person, typical of nothing; and others, known or unknown. We were now important, had our Committee room in the Mansion House, and I remember that the old Mansion House butler recognised our importance so fully, that he took us into his confidence once in every week, while we sat waiting for a quorum. He had seen many Lord Mayors, and remembered those very superior Lord Mayors who lived before the extension of the municipal franchise, and spoke of his present masters with contempt. Among our persons of authority, and among the friends and followers they had brought, there were many who at that time found it hard to refuse if anybody offered for sale a pepper-pot shaped to suggest a round tower with a wolf-dog at its foot, and who would have felt it inappropriate to publish an Irish book, that had not harp and shamrock and green cover, so completely did their minds move amid Young Ireland images and metaphors, and I thought with alarm of the coming of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy; while here and there I noticed that smooth, smiling face that we

discover for the first time in certain pictures by Velasquez; all that hungry, mediaeval speculation vanished, that had worn the faces of El Greco and in its place a self-complacent certainty that all had been arranged, provided for, set out in clear type, in manual of devotion or of doctrine. These, however, were no true disciples of Young Ireland, for Young Ireland had sought a nation unified by political doctrine, a subservient art and letters aiding and abetting. The movement of thought, which had in the ‘fifties and ‘fourties at Paris and London and Boston, filled literature, and especially poetical literature with curiosities about science, about history about politics, with moral purpose and educational fervour — abstractions all — had created a new instrument for Irish politics, a method of writing that took its poetical style from Campbell, Scott, Macauley, and Beranger, with certain elements from Gaelic, and its prose style — in John Mitchell, the only Young Ireland prose writer who had a style at all — from Carlyle. To recommend this method of writing as literature without much reservation and discrimination I contended was to be deceived or to practice deception. If one examined some country love-song, one discovered that it was not written by a man in love, but by a patriot who wanted to prove that we did indeed possess, in the words of Daniel O’Connell, “the finest peasantry upon earth.” Yet one well-known anthology was introduced by the assertion that such love-poetry was superior to “affected and artificial” English love-songs like “Drink to me only with thine eyes” — “affected and artificial,” the very words used by English Victorians who wrote for the newspapers to discourage capricious, personal writing. However, the greater number even of those who thought our famous anthology, *The Spirit of the Nation*, except for three or four songs, but good election rhyme, looked upon it much as certain enlightened believers look upon the story of Adam and Eve and the apple, or that of Jonah and the whale, which they do not question publicly,

because such stories are an integral part of religion to simple men and women. I, upon the other hand, being in the intemperance of my youth, denied, as publicly as possible, merit to all but a few ballads translated from Gaelic writers, or written out of a personal and generally tragic experience.

III

The greater number of those who joined my society had come under the seal of Young Ireland at that age when we are all mere wax; the more ambitious had gone daily to some public library to read the bound volumes of Thomas Davis's old newspaper, and tried to see the world as Davis saw it. No philosophic speculation, no economic question of the day, disturbed an orthodoxy which, unlike that of religion had no philosophic history, and the religious bigot was glad that it should be so. Some few of the younger men were impatient, and it was these younger men, more numerous in the London than in the Dublin Society, who gave me support; and we had been joined by a few older men — some personal friends of my own or my father — who had only historical interest in Thomas Davis and his school. Young Ireland's prose had been as much occupied with Irish virtue, and more with the invader's vices, than its poetry, and we were soon mired and sunk into such problems as to whether Cromwell was altogether black, the heads of the old Irish clans altogether white, the Danes mere robbers and church burners (they tell me at Rosses Point that the Danes keep to this day the maps of the Rosses fields they were driven out of in the 9th century, and plot their return) and as to whether we were or were not once the greatest orators in the world. All the past had been turned into a melodrama with Ireland for blameless hero and poet, novelist and historian had but one object, that we should hiss the villain, and only a minority doubted that the

greater the talent the greater the hiss. It was all the harder to substitute for that melodrama a nobler form of art, because there really had been, however different in their form, villain and victim; yet fight that rancour I must, and if I had not made some head against it in 1892 and 1893 it might have silenced in 1907 John Synge, the greatest dramatic genius of Ireland. I am writing of disputes that happened many years ago, that led in later years to much bitterness, and I may exaggerate their immediate importance and violence, but I think I am right in saying that disputes about the merits of Young Ireland so often interrupted our discussion of rules, or of the merit of this or that lecturer, and were so aggravated and crossed by the current wrangle between Parnellite and anti-Parnellite that they delayed our public appearance for a year. Other excited persons, doubtless, seeing that we are of a race intemperate of speech, had looked up from their rancours to the dead Lord Mayors upon the wall, superior men whose like we shall not see again, but never, I think, from rancours so seemingly academic. I was preparing the way without knowing it for a great satirist and master of irony, for master works stir vaguely in many before they grow definite in one man's mind, and to help me I had already flitting through my head, jostling other ideas and so not yet established there, a conviction that we should satirize rather than praise, that original virtue arises from the discovery of evil. If we were, as I had dreaded, declamatory, loose, and bragging, we were but the better fitted, that once declared and measured, to create unyielding personality, manner at once cold and passionate, daring long premeditated act; and if bitter beyond all the people of the world, we might yet lie, that too declared and measured, nearest the honeyed comb: —

"Like the clangour of a bell
Sweet and harsh, harsh and sweet,

That is how he learnt so well
To take the roses for his meat.”

IV

There were others with followers of their own, and too old or indifferent to join our society. Old men who had never accepted Young Ireland, or middle-aged men kept by some family tradition to the school of thought before it arose, to the Ireland of Daniel O’Connell and of Lever and of Thomas Moore, convivial Ireland with the traditional tear and smile. They sang Moore’s *Melodies*, admitted no poetry but his, and resented Young Ireland’s political objections to it as much as my generation’s objection to its artificial and easy rhythm; one, an old commercial traveller, a Gaelic scholar who kept an erect head and the animal vigour of youth, frequented the houses of our leading men, and would say in a loud voice, “Thomas Moore, sir, is the greatest heroic poet of ancient or modern times.” I think it was the Fire Worshippers in *Lalla Rookh* that he preferred to Homer; or, jealous for the music of the *Melodies*, denounce Wagner, then at the top of his vogue; “I would run ten miles through a bog to escape him,” he would cry. Then there was a maker of tombstones of whom we had heard much but had seen little, an elderly fighting man, lately imprisoned for beating a wine-merchant. A young member of the London society, afterwards librarian to the National University, D. J. O’Donohue, who had published a dictionary of the Irish poets, containing, I think, two thousand names, had come to Dublin and settled there in a fit of patriotism. He had been born in London, and spoke the most Cockney dialect imaginable, and had picked up — probably from London critics — a dislike for the poetry of Thomas

Moore. The tombstone maker invited him to tea, and he arrived with a bundle of books, which he laid beside him upon the table. During tea he began expounding that dislike of his; his host was silent, but he went on, for he was an obstinate little man. Presently the tombstone-maker rose, and having said solemnly, "I have never permitted that great poet to be slandered in my presence," seized his guest by the back of the collar, and flung him out into the street, and after that flung out the books one after another. Meanwhile the guest — as he himself told the tale — stood in the middle of the street repeating, "Nice way to treat a man in your own 'ouse."

V

I shared a lodging full of old books and magazines, covered with dirt and dust, with the head of the Fenian Brotherhood, John O'Leary. "In this country," he had said to me, "a man must have upon his side the Church or the Fenians, and you will never have the Church." He had been converted to nationality by the poems of Davis, and he wished for some analogous movement to that of Davis, but he had known men of letters, had been the friend of Whistler, and knew the faults of the old literature. We had made him the President of our Society, and without him I could do nothing, for his long imprisonment and longer exile, his magnificent appearance, and, above all, the fact that he alone had personality, a point of view not made for the crowd's sake, but for self-expression, made him magnetic to my generation. He and I had long been friends, he had stayed with us at Bedford Park, and my father had painted his portrait, but if I had not shared his lodging he would have opposed me. He was an old man, and my point of view was not that of his youth, and it often took me half the day to make

him understand — so suspicious he was of all innovation — some simple thing that he would presently support with ardour. He had grown up in a European movement when the revolutionist thought that he, above all men, must appeal to the highest motive, be guided by some ideal principle, be a little like Cato or like Brutus, and he had lived to see the change Dostoievsky examined in *The Possessed*. Men who had been of his party — and oftener their sons — preached assassination and the bomb; and, worst of all, the majority of his countrymen followed after constitutional politicians who practised opportunism, and had, as he believed, such low morals that they would lie, or publish private correspondence, if it might advance their cause. He would split every practical project into its constituent elements, like a clerical casuist, to find if it might not lead into some moral error; but, were the project revolutionary, he would sometimes temper condemnation with pity. Though he would cast off his oldest acquaintance did he suspect him of rubbing shoulders with some carrier of bombs, I have heard him say of a man who blew himself up in an attempt to blow up Westminster Bridge, "He was not a bad man, but he had too great a moral nature for his intellect, not that he lacked intellect." He did not explain, but he meant, I suppose, that the spectacle of injustice might madden a good man more quickly than some common man. Such men were of his own sort, though gone astray, but the constitutional politicians he had been fighting all his life, and all they did displeased him. It was not that he thought their aim wrong, or that they could not achieve it; he had accepted Gladstone's Home Rule Bill; but that in his eyes they degraded manhood. "If England has been brought to do us justice by such men," he would say, "that is not because of our strength, but because of her weakness." He had a particular hatred for the rush of emotion that followed the announcement of Gladstone's conversion, for what was called "The Union of Hearts," and

derided its sentimentality; “Nations may respect one another,” he would say, “they cannot love.” His ancestors had probably kept little shops, or managed little farms in County Tipperary, yet he hated democracy, though he never used the word either for praise or blame, with more than feudal hatred. “No gentleman can be a socialist,” he said, and then, with a thoughtful look, “He might be an anarchist.” He had no philosophy, but things distressed his palate, and two of those things were International propaganda and the Organised State, and Socialism aimed at both, nor could he speak such words as “philanthropy,” “humanitarianism,” without showing by his tone of voice that they offended him. The Church pleased him little better; there was an old Fenian quarrel there, and he would say, “My religion is the old Persian, to pull the bow and tell the truth.” He had no self-consciousness, no visible pride, and would have hated anything that could have been called a gesture, was indeed scarce artist enough to invent a gesture; yet he would never speak of the hardship of his prison life — though abundantly enough of its humours — and once, when I pressed him, replied, “I was in the hands of my enemy, why should I complain?” A few years ago I heard that the Governor of the prison had asked why he did not report some unnecessary discomfort, and O’Leary had said, “I did not come here to complain.” Now that he is dead, I wish that I could question him, and perhaps discover whether in early youth he had come across some teacher who had expounded Roman virtue, but I doubt if I would have learnt anything, for I think the wax had long forgotten the seal — if seal there were. The seal was doubtless made before the eloquent humanitarian ‘forties and ‘fifties, and was one kind with that that had moulded the youthful mind of Savage Landor. Stephens, the founder of Fenianism, had discovered him searching the second-hand bookstalls for rare editions, and enrolled him in his organization. “You have no chance of success,” O’Leary

had said “but it will be good for the *morale* of the country” (*morale* was his great word), “and I will join on the condition that I am never asked to enrol anybody.” He still searched the second-hand bookstalls, and had great numbers of books, especially of Irish history and literature, and when I, exhausted over our morning’s casuistry, would sit down to my day’s work (I was writing *The Secret Rose*) he would make his tranquil way to the Dublin Quays. In the evening, over his coffee, he would write passages for his memoirs upon postcards and odd scraps of paper, taking immense trouble with every word and comma, for the great work must be a masterpiece of style. When it was finished, it was unreadable, being dry, abstract, and confused; no picture had ever passed before his mind’s eye. He was a victim, I think, of a movement where opinions stick men together, or keep them apart, like a kind of bird lime, and without any relation to their natural likes and tastes, and where men of rich nature must give themselves up to an irritation which they no longer recognise because it is always present. I often wonder why he gave me his friendship, why it was he who found almost all the subscribers for my *Wanderings of Usheen*, and why he now supported me in all I did, for how could he like verses that were all picture, all emotion, all association, all mythology? He could not have approved my criticism either, for I exalted Mask and Image above the 18th century logic which he loved, and set experience before observation, emotion before fact. Yet he would say, “I have only three followers, Taylor, Yeats, and Rolleston,” and presently he cast out Rolleston — “Davitt wants to convert thousands, but I want two or three.” I think that perhaps it was because he no more wished to strengthen Irish Nationalism by second-rate literature than by second-rate morality, and was content that we agreed in that. “There are things a man must not do to save a Nation,” he had once told me, and when I asked what things, had said, “To cry in public,” and I

think it probable that he would have added, if pressed, “To write oratorical or insincere verse.”

O’Leary’s movements and intonations were full of impulse, but John F. Taylor’s voice in private discussion had no emotional quality except in the expression of scorn; if he moved an arm it moved from the shoulder or elbow alone, and when he walked he moved from the waist only, and seemed an automaton, a wooden soldier, as if he had no life that was not dry and abstract. Except at moments of public oratory, he lacked all personality, though when one saw him respectful and gentle with O’Leary, as with some charming woman, one saw that he felt its fascination. In letters, or in painting, it repelled him unless it were harsh and obvious, and, therefore, though his vast erudition included much art and letters, he lacked artistic feeling, and judged everything by the moral sense. He had great ambition, and had he joined some established party, or found some practicable policy, he might have been followed, might have produced even some great effect, but he must have known that in defeat no man would follow him, as they followed O’Leary, as they followed Parnell. His oratory was noble, strange, even beautiful, at moments the greatest I have ever listened to; but, the speech over, where there had been, as it seemed, so little of himself, all coming from beyond himself, we saw precisely as before an ungainly body in unsuitable, badly-fitting clothes, and heard an excited voice speaking ill of this man or that other. We knew that he could never give us that one price we would accept, that he would never find a practicable policy; that no party would admit, no government negotiate with, a man notorious for a temper, that, if it gave him genius, could at times carry him to the edge of insanity.

Born in some country town, the son of some little watchmaker, he had been a shop assistant, put himself to college and the bar, learned to speak at

temperance meetings and Young Ireland societies, and was now a Queen's Counsel famous for his defence of country criminals, whose cases had seemed hopeless — Taylor's boys, their neighbours called them or they called themselves. He had shaped his style and his imagination from Carlyle, the chief inspirer of self-educated men in the 'eighties and early 'nineties. "I prefer Emerson's *Oversoul*," the Condalkin cobbler said to me, "but I always read Carlyle when I am wild with the neighbours"; but he used his master's style, as Mitchell had done before, to abase what his master loved, to exalt what his master scorned. His historical erudition seemed as vast as that of York Powell, but his interests were not Powell's, for he had no picture before the mind's eye, and had but one object — a plea of not guilty — entered in his country's name before a jury which he believed to be packed. O'Leary cared nothing for his country's glory, its individuality alone seemed important in his eyes; he was like some man, who serves a woman all his life without asking whether she be good or bad, wise or foolish; but Taylor cared for nothing else; he was so much O'Leary's disciple that he would say in conversation, "We are demoralised, what case for change if we are not?" for O'Leary admitted no ground for reform outside the moral life, but when he spoke to the great plea he would make no admission. He spoke to it in the most obscure places, in little halls in back streets where the white-washed walls are foul with grease from many heads, before some audience of medical students or of shop assistants, for he was like a man under a curse, compelled to hide his genius, and compelled to show in conspicuous places his ill judgment and his temper.

His distaste for myself, broken by occasional tolerance, in so far as it was not distaste for an imagination that seemed to him aesthetic rather than ethical, was because I had published Irish folk-lore in English reviews to

the discredit, as he thought, of the Irish peasantry, and because, England within earshot, I found fault with the Young Ireland prose and poetry. He would have hated *The Playboy of the Western World*, and his death a little before its performance was fortunate for Synge and myself. His articles are nothing, and his one historical work, a life of Hugh O'Neill, is almost nothing, lacking the living voice; and now, though a most formidable man, he is forgotten, but for the fading memory of a few friends, and for what an enemy has written here and elsewhere. Did not Leonardo da Vinci warn the imaginative man against pre-occupation with arts that cannot survive his death?

VI

When Carleton was dying in 1870, he said there would be nothing more about Irish Literature for twenty years, and his words were fulfilled, for the land war had filled Ireland with its bitterness; but imagination had begun to stir again. I had the same confidence in the future that Lady Gregory and I had eight or nine years later, when we founded an Irish Theatre, though there were neither, as it seemed, plays or players. There were already a few known men to start my popular series, and to keep it popular until the men, whose names I did not know, had learnt to express themselves. I had met Dr. Douglas Hyde when I lived in Dublin, and he was still an undergraduate. I have a memory of meeting in college rooms for the first time a very dark young man, who filled me with surprise, partly because he had pushed a snuffbox towards me, and partly because there was something about his vague serious eyes, as in his high cheek bones, that suggested a different civilization, a different race. I had set him down as a peasant, and wondered what brought him to college, and to a Protestant college, but

somebody explained that he belonged to some branch of the Hydes of Castle Hyde, and that he had a Protestant Rector for father. He had much frequented the company of old countrymen, and had so acquired the Irish language, and his taste for snuff, and for moderate quantities of a detestable species of illegal whiskey distilled from the potato by certain of his neighbours. He had already — though intellectual Dublin knew nothing of it — considerable popularity as a Gaelic poet, mowers and reapers singing his songs from Donegal to Kerry. Years afterwards I was to stand at his side and listen to Galway mowers singing his Gaelic words without knowing whose words they sang. It is so in India, where peasants sing the words of the great poet of Bengal without knowing whose words they sing, and it must often be so where the old imaginative folk life is undisturbed, and it is so amongst schoolboys who hand their story books to one another without looking at the title page to read the author's name. Here and there, however, the peasants had not lost the habit of Gaelic criticism, picked up, perhaps, from the poets who took refuge among them after the ruin of the great Catholic families, from men like that O'Rahilly, who cries in a translation from the Gaelic that is itself a masterpiece of concentrated passion —

"The periwinkle and the tough dog-fish
Towards evening time have got into my dish."

An old rascal was kept in food and whiskey for a fortnight by some Connaught village under the belief that he was Craoibhin Aoibhin, "the pleasant little branch," as Doctor Hyde signed himself in the newspapers where the villagers had found his songs. The impostor's thirst only strengthened belief in his genius, for the Gaelic song-writers have had the infirmities of Robert Burns, "It is not the drink but the company," one of the last has sung. Since that first meeting Doctor Hyde and I had corresponded,

and he had sent me in manuscript the best tale in my *Faery and Folk Tales*, and I think I had something to do with the London publication of his *Beside the Fire*, a book written in the beautiful English of Connaught, which is Gaelic in idiom and Tudor in vocabulary, and indeed, the first book to use it in the expression of emotion and romance, for Carleton and his school had turned it into farce. Henley had praised him, and York Powell had said, "If he goes on as he has begun, he will be the greatest folk-loreist who has ever lived"; and I know no first book of verse of our time that is at once so romantic and so concrete as his Gaelic *Abhla de'n Craoibh*; but in a few years Dublin was to laugh him, or rail him, out of his genius. He had no critical capacity, having indeed for certain years the uncritical folk-genius, as no educated Irish or Englishman has ever had it, writing out of an imitative sympathy like that of a child catching a tune and leaving it to chance to call the tune; and the failure of our first attempt to create a modern Irish literature permitted the ruin of that genius. He was to create a great popular movement, far more important in its practical results than any movement I could have made, no matter what my luck, but, being neither quarrelsome nor vain, he will not be angry if I say — for the sake of those who come after us — that I mourn for the "greatest folk-loreist who ever lived," and for the great poet who died in his youth. The Harps and Pepperpots got him and the Harps and Pepperpots kept him till he wrote in our common English — "It must be either English or Irish," said some patriotic editor, Young Ireland practice in his head — that needs such sifting that he who would write it vigorously must write it like a learned language, and took for his model the newspaper upon his breakfast table, and became for no base reason beloved by multitudes who should never have heard his name till their schoolmasters showed it upon his tomb. That very incapacity for criticism made him the cajoler of crowds, and of

individual men and women; “He should not be in the world at all,” said one admiring elderly woman, “or doing the world’s work”; and for certain years young Irish women were to display his pseudonym, “Craoibhin Aoibhin,” in gilt letters upon their hat bands.

“Dear Craoibhin Aoibhin,.....impart to us,
We’ll keep the secret, a new trick to please;
Is there a bridle for this Proteus
That turns and changes like his draughty seas,
Or is there none, most popular of men,
But, when they mock us, that we mock again?”

VII

Standish O’Grady, upon the other hand, was at once all passion and all judgment. And yet those who knew him better than I assured me he could find quarrel in a straw; and I did know that he had quarrelled a few years back with Jack Nettleship. Nettleship’s account had been, “My mother cannot endure the God of the Old Testament, but likes Jesus Christ; whereas I like the God of the Old Testament, and cannot endure Jesus Christ; and we have got into the way of quarrelling about it at lunch; and once, when O’Grady lunched with us, he said it was the most disgraceful spectacle he had ever seen, and walked out.” Indeed, I wanted him among my writers, because of his quarrels, for, having much passion and little rancour, the more he quarrelled, the nobler, the more patched with metaphor, the more musical his style became, and if he were in his turn attacked, he knew a trick of speech that made us murmur, “We do it wrong, being so majestical, to offer it the show of violence.” Sometimes he quarrelled most where he

loved most. A Unionist in politics, a leader-writer on *The Daily Express*, the most Conservative paper in Ireland, hater of every form of democracy, he had given all his heart to the smaller Irish landowners, to whom he belonged, and with whom his childhood had been spent, and for them he wrote his books, and would soon rage over their failings in certain famous passages that many men would repeat to themselves like poets' rhymes. All round us people talked or wrote for victory's sake, and were hated for their victories — but here was a man whose rage was a swan-song over all that he had held most dear, and to whom for that very reason every Irish imaginative writer owed a portion of his soul. In his unfinished *History of Ireland* he had made the old Irish heroes, Fion, and Oisin, and Cuchullan, alive again, taking them, for I think he knew no Gaelic, from the dry pages of O'Curry and his school, and condensing and arranging, as he thought Homer would have arranged and condensed. Lady Gregory has told the same tales, but keeping closer to the Gaelic text, and with greater powers of arrangement and a more original style, but O'Grady was the first, and we had read him in our 'teens. I think that, had I succeeded, a popular audience could have changed him little, and that his genius would have stayed, as it had been shaped by his youth in some provincial society, and that to the end he would have shown his best in occasional thrusts and parries. But I do think that if, instead of that one admirable little book *The Bog of Stars*, we had got all his histories and imaginative works into the hands of our young men, he might have brought the imagination of Ireland nearer the Image and the honeycomb.

Lionel Johnson was to be our critic, and above all our theologian, for he had been converted to Catholicism, and his orthdoxy, too learned to question, had accepted all that we did, and most of our plans. Historic Catholicism, with all its counsels and its dogmas, stirred his passion like the

beauty of a mistress, and the unlearned parish priests who thought good literature or good criticism dangerous were in his eyes “all heretics.” He belonged to a family that had called itself Irish some generations back, and its recent English generations but enabled him to see as one single sacred tradition Irish nationality and Catholic religion. How should he fail to know the Holy Land? Had he not been in Egypt? He had joined our London Irish Literary Society, attended its committee meetings, and given lectures in London, in Dublin, and in Belfast, on Irish novelists and Irish poetry, reading his lectures always, and yet affecting his audience as I, with my spoken lectures, could not, perhaps because Ireland had still the shape it had received from the eighteenth century, and so felt the dignity, not the artifice, of his elaborate periods. He was very little, and at a first glance he seemed but a schoolboy of fifteen. I remember saying one night at the Rhymers’, when he spoke of passing safely, almost nightly, through Seven Dials, then a dangerous neighbourhood, “Who would expect to find anything in your pockets but a pegtop and a piece of string?” But one never thought of his small stature when he spoke or read. He had the delicate strong features of a certain filleted head of a Greek athlete in the British Museum, an archaistic Graeco-Roman copy of a masterpiece of the fourth century, and that resemblance seemed symbolic of the austere nobility of his verse. He was now in his best years, writing with great ease and power; neither I, nor, I think, any other, foresaw his tragedy.

He suffered from insomnia, and some doctor, while he was still at the University, had recommended alcohol, and he had, in a vain hope of sleep, increased the amount, as Rossetti had increased his doses of chloral, and now he drank for drinking’s sake. He drank a great deal too much, and, though nothing could, it seemed, disturb his calm or unsteady his hand or foot, his doctrine, after a certain number of glasses, would become more

ascetic, more contemptuous of all that we call human life. I have heard him, after four or five glasses of wine, praise some church father who freed himself from sexual passion by a surgical operation, and deny with scorn, and much historical evidence, that a gelded man lost anything of intellectual power. Even without stimulant his theology conceded nothing to human weakness, and I can remember his saying with energy, "I wish those people who deny the eternity of punishment could realise their unspeakable vulgarity."

Now that I know his end, I see him creating, to use a favourite adjective of his, "marmorean" verse, and believing the most terrible doctrines to keep down his own turbulence. One image of that stay in Dublin is so clear before me that it has blotted out most other images of that time. He is sitting at a lodging-house table, which I have just left at three in the morning, and round him lie or sit in huddled attitudes half-a-dozen men in various states of intoxication: and he is looking straight before him with head erect, and one hand resting upon the table. As I reach the stairs I hear him say, in a clear, unshaken voice, "I believe in nothing but the Holy Roman Catholic Church." He sometimes spoke of drink as something which he could put aside at any moment, and his friends believed, and I think he liked us to believe, that he would shortly enter a monastery. Did he deceive us deliberately? Did he himself already foresee the moment when he would write *The Dark Angel*? I am almost certain that he did, for he had already written *Mystic and Cavalier*, where the historical setting is, I believe, but masquerade.

"Go from me: I am one of those, who fall.
What! hath no cold wind swept your heart at all,
In my sad company? Before the end,
Go from me, dear my friend!

Yours are the victories of light: your feet
Rest from good toil, where rest is brave and sweet.
But after warfare in a mourning gloom
I rest in clouds of doom.
…..
Seek with thine eyes to pierce this crystal sphere:
Canst read a fate there, prosperous and clear?
Only the mists, only the weeping clouds:
Dimness, and airy shrouds.
…..
O rich and sounding voices of the air!
Interpreters and prophets of despair:
Priests of a fearful sacrament! I come
To make with you my home."

VIII

Sir Charles Gavan Duffy arrived. He brought with him much manuscript, the private letters of a Young Ireland poetess, a dry but informing unpublished historical essay by Davis, and an unpublished novel by William Carleton, into the middle of which he had dropped a hot coal, so that nothing remained but the borders of every page. He hired a young man to read him, after dinner, Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, and before dinner was gracious to all our men of authority and especially to our Harps and Pepperpots. Taylor compared him to Odysseus returning to Ithaca, and every newspaper published his biography. He was a white-haired old man,

who had written the standard history of Young Ireland, had emigrated to Australia, had been the first Australian Federalist, and later Prime Minister, but, in all his writings, in which there is so much honesty, so little rancour, there is not one sentence that has any meaning when separated from its place in argument or narrative, not one distinguished because of its thought or music. One imagined his youth in some little gaunt Irish town, where no building or custom is revered for its antiquity; and there speaking a language where no word, even in solitude, is ever spoken slowly and carefully because of emotional implication; and of his manhood of practical politics, of the dirty piece of orange-peel in the corner of the stairs as one climbs up to some newspaper office; of public meetings where it would be treacherous amid so much geniality to speak, or even to think of anything that might cause a moment's misunderstanding in one's own party. No argument of mine was intelligible to him, and I would have been powerless, but that fifty years ago he had made an enemy, and though that enemy was long dead, his school remained. He had attacked, why or with what result I do not remember, the only Young Ireland politician who had music and personality, though rancorous and devil-possessed. At some public meeting of ours, where he spoke amid great applause, in smooth, Gladstonian periods, of his proposed Irish publishing firm, one heard faint hostile murmurs, and at last a voice cried, "Remember Newry," and a voice answered, "There is a grave there!" and a part of the audience sang, "Here's to John Mitchell that is gone, boys, gone; Here's to the friends that are gone." The meeting over, a group of us, indignant that the meeting we had called for his welcome should have contained those malcontents, gathered about him to apologize. He had written a pamphlet, he explained: he would give us copies. We would see that he was in the right, how badly Mitchell had behaved. But in Ireland personality, if it be but harsh and hard, has

lovers, and some of us, I think, may have gone home muttering, “How dare he be in the right if Mitchell is in the wrong?”

IX

He wanted “to complete the Young Ireland movement” — to do all that had been left undone because of the Famine, or the death of Davis, or his own emigration; and all the younger men were upon my side in resisting that. They might not want the books I wanted, but they did want books written by their own generation, and we began to struggle with him over the control of the company. Taylor became very angry, and I can understand what I looked like in his eyes, when I remember Edwin Ellis’s seriously-intended warning, “It is bad manners for a man under thirty to permit himself to be in the right.” But John O’Leary supported me throughout.

When Gavin Duffy had gone to London to draw up articles of association for his company, for which he had found many shareholders in Dublin, the dispute became very fierce. One night members of the general public climbed the six flights of stairs to our committee room, now no longer in the Mansion House, and found seats for themselves just behind our chairs. We were all too angry to send them away, or even to notice their presence, for I was accused of saying at a public meeting in Cork, “Our books,” when I should have said, “Sir Charles Gavan Duffy’s books.” I was not Taylor’s match with the spoken word, and barely matched him with the written word. At twenty-seven or twenty-eight I was immature and clumsy, and O’Leary’s support was capricious, for, being but a spectator of life, he would desert me if I used a bad argument, and would not return till I found a good one; and our chairman, Dr. Hyde, “most popular of men,” sat dreaming of his old white cockatoo in far-away Roscommon. Our very

success had been a misfortune, for an opposition which had been literary and political, now that it had spread to the general public, brought religious prejudice to its aid. Suddenly, when the company seemed all but established, and a scheme had been thought out which gave some representation on its governing board to contemporary Irish writers, Gavan Duffy produced a letter from Archbishop Walsh, and threw the project up. The letter had warned him that after his death the company would fall under a dangerous influence. At this moment the always benevolent friend, to whom I had explained in confidence, when asking his support, my arrangements with my publisher, went to Gavan Duffy and suggested that they should together offer Mr Fisher Unwin a series of Irish books, and Mr Fisher Unwin and his reader accepted the series under the belief that it was my project that they accepted. I went to London to find the contract signed, and that all I could do was to get two sub-editors appointed, responsible to the two societies. Two or three good books were published, especially Dr. Hyde's *Short History of Gaelic Literature*, and Standish O'Grady's *Bog of Stars*; but the series was killed by its first volume, Thomas Davis's dry but informing historical essay. So important had our movement seemed that ten thousand copies had been sold before anybody had time to read it, and then came a dead stop.

Gavan Duffy knew nothing of my plans, and so was guiltless, and my friend had heard me discuss many things that evening. I had perhaps dispraised the humanitarian Stephen Phillips, already in his first vogue, and praised Francis Thompson, but half-rescued from his gutter; or flouted his belief in the perpetual marriage of genius and virtue by numbering the vices of famous men; this man's venery, that man's drink. He could not be expected to remember that where I had said so much of no account, I said one thing, and he had made no reply, that I thought of great account. He

died a few months ago, and it would have surprised and shocked him if any man had told him that he was unforgiven; had he not forgotten all about it long ago? A German doctor has said that if we leave an umbrella at a friend's house it is because we have a sub-conscious desire to re-visit that house; and he had perhaps a sub-conscious desire that my too tumultuous generation should not have its say.

X

I was at Sligo when I received a letter from John O'Leary, saying that I could do no more in Dublin, for even the younger men had turned against me, were "jealous," his letter said, though what they had to be jealous of God knows. He said further that it was all my own fault, that he had warned me what would happen if I lived on terms of intimacy with those I tried to influence. I should have kept myself apart and alone. It was all true; through some influence from an earlier generation, from Walt Whitman, perhaps, I had sat talking in public bars, had talked late into the night at many men's houses, showing all my convictions to men that were but ready for one, and used conversation to explore and discover among men who looked for authority. I did not yet know that intellectual freedom and social equality are incompatible; and yet, if I had, could hardly have lived otherwise, being too young for silence. The trouble came from half a dozen obscure young men, who having nothing to do attended every meeting and were able to overturn a project, that seemed my only bridge to other projects, including a travelling theatre. We had planned small libraries of Irish literature in connection with our country branches; we collected books and money, sending a lecturer to every branch and taking half the proceeds of that lecture to buy books. Maud Gonne, whose beauty could draw a great

audience in any country town, had been the lecturer. The scheme was very nearly self-supporting, and six or seven bundles of books, chosen after much disputation by John O'Leary, J. F. Taylor, and myself, had been despatched to some six or seven branches. "The country will support this work" Taylor had said somewhere on some public platform, "because we are the most inflammable people on God's earth," his harsh voice giving almost a quality of style to Carlylian commonplace; but we are also a very jealous people. The half-a-dozen young men, if a little jealous of me, were still more jealous of those country branches which were getting so much notice, and where there was so much of that peasant mind their schoolmasters had taught them to despise. One must be English or Irish, they would have said. I returned to find a great box of books appropriated for some Dublin purpose and the whole scheme abandoned. I know that it was a bitter moment because I remember with gratitude words spoken not to my ear, but for my ear, by a young man who had lately joined our Society, Mr. Stephen McKenna, now well-known amongst scholars for his distinguished translations of Plotinus, and I seem to remember that I lost through anger what gift of persuasion I may possess, and that I was all the more helpless because I felt that even the best of us disagreed about everything at heart. I began to feel that I needed a hostess more than a society, but that I was not to find for years to come. I tried to persuade Maud Gonne to be that hostess, but her social life was in Paris, and she had already formed a new ambition, the turning of French public opinion against England. Without intellectual freedom there can be no agreement, and in Nationalist Dublin there was not — indeed there still is not — any society where a man is heard by the right ears, but never overheard by the wrong, and where he speaks his whole mind gaily, and is not the cautious husband of a part; where phantasy can play before matured into conviction;

where life can shine and ring, and lack utility. Mere life lacking the protection of wealth or rank, or some beauty's privilege of caprice cannot choose its company, taking up and dropping men merely because it likes, or dislikes, their manners and their looks, and in its stead opinion crushes and rends, and all is hatred and bitterness: wheel biting upon wheel, a roar of steel or iron tackle, a mill of argument grinding all things down to mediocrity. If, as I think, minds and metals correspond the goldsmiths of Paris foretold the French Revolution when they substituted steel for that unserviceable gold in the manufacture of the more expensive jewel work, and made those large, flat steel buttons for men of fashion whereby the card players were able to cheat by studying the reflections of the cards.

XI

No country could have more natural distaste for equality, for in every circle there was some man ridiculous for posing as the type of some romantic or distinguished quality. One of our friends, a man of talent and of learning, whose ancestors had come, he believed, from Denmark in the ninth century, looked and talked the distinguished foreigner so perfectly that a patriotic newspaper gave particulars of his supposed relations in contemporary Denmark! A half-mad old man who had served for a few months in the Pope's army, many years before, still rode an old white warhorse in all national processions, and, if their enemies were not lying, one Town Councillor had challenged another to a duel by flinging his glove upon the floor; while a popular Lord Mayor had boasted in a public speech that he never went to bed at night without reading at least twelve pages of *Sappho*. Then, too, in those conversations of the small hours, to which O'Leary had so much objected, whenever we did not speak of art and

letters, we spoke of Parnell. We told each other that he had admitted no man to his counsel; that when some member of his party found himself in the same hotel by chance, that member would think to stay there a presumption, and move to some other lodging; and, above all, we spoke of his pride, that made him hide all emotion while before his enemy. Once he had seemed callous and indifferent to the House of Commons, Foster had accused him of abetting assassination, but when he came among his followers his hands were full of blood, because he had torn them with his nails. What excitement there would have been, what sense of mystery would have stirred all our hearts, and stirred hearts all through the country, where there was still, and for many years to come, but one overmastering topic, had we known the story Mrs. Parnell tells of that scene on Brighton Pier. He and the woman that he loved stood there upon a night of storm, when his power was at its greatest height, and still unthreatened. He caught her from the ground and held her at arm's length out over the water and she lay there motionless, knowing that, had she moved, he would have drowned himself and her. Perhaps unmotived self-immolation, were that possible, or else at mere suggestion of storm and night, were as great evidence as such a man could give of power over self, and so of the expression of the self.

XII

When I look back upon my Irish propaganda of those years I can see little but its bitterness. I never met with, or but met to quarrel with, my father's old family acquaintance; or with acquaintance I myself might have found, and kept, among the prosperous educated class, who had all the great appointments at University or Castle; and this I did by deliberate calculation. If I must attack so much that seemed sacred to Irish nationalist

opinion, I must, I knew, see to it that no man suspect me of doing it to flatter Unionist opinion. Whenever I got the support of some man who belonged by birth and education to University or Castle, I would say, "Now you must be baptized of the gutter." I chose Royal visits especially for demonstrations of disloyalty, rolling up with my own hands the red carpet spread by some elderly Nationalist, softened or weakened by time, to welcome Viceroyalty; and threatening, if the London Society drank to the King's health, that my friends and I would demonstrate against it by turning our glasses upside down; and was presently to discover that one can grow impassioned and fanatical about opinions, which one has chosen as one might choose a side upon the football field; and I thought many a time of the pleasant Dublin houses that would never ask me to dine; and the still pleasanter houses with trout-streams near at hand, that would never ask me upon a visit. I became absurdly sensitive, glancing about me in certain public places, the private view of our Academy, or the like, to discover imagined enemies; and even now, after twenty or thirty years, I feel at times that I have not recovered my natural manner. Yet it was in those pleasant houses, among the young men and the young girls, that we were to make our converts. When we loathe ourselves or our world, if that loathing but turn to intellect, we see self or world and its anti-self as in one vision; when loathing remains but loathing, world or self consumes itself away, and we turn to its mechanical opposite. Popular Nationalism and Unionism so changed into one another, being each but the other's headache. The Nationalist abstractions were like the fixed ideas of some hysterical woman, a part of the mind turned into stone, and all the rest a seething and burning; and Unionist Ireland had re-acted from that seething and burning to a cynical indifference, and from those fixed ideas to whatever might bring the most easy and obvious success.

I remember Taylor at some public debate, stiff of body and tense of voice; and the contrasting figure of Fitzgibbon, the Lord Justice of Appeal of the moment and his calm, flowing sentences, satisfactory to hear and impossible to remember. Taylor speaks of a little nation of antiquity, which he does not name, "set between the great Empire of Persia and the great Empire of Rome." Into the mouths of those great Empires he puts the arguments of Fitzgibbon, and such as he, "Join with our greatness! What in comparison to that is your little, beggarly nationality?" And then I recall the excitement, the shiver of the nerves, as his voice rose to an ecstatic cry, "Out of that nation came the salvation of the world." I remember, too, and grow angry, as it were yesterday, a letter from that Lord Justice of Appeal, who had changed his politics for advancement's sake, recommending a correspondent to avoid us, because we dissuaded people from the study of "Shakespeare and Kingsley."

Edward Dowden, my father's old friend, with his dark romantic face, the one man of letters Dublin Unionism possessed, was withering in that barren soil. Towards the end of his life he confessed to a near friend that he would have wished before all things to have been the lover of many women; and some careless lecture, upon the youthful Goethe, had in early life drawn down upon him the displeasure of the Protestant Archbishop. And yet he turned Shakespeare into a British Benthamite, flattered Shelley but to hide his own growing lack of sympathy, abandoned for like reason that study of Goethe that should have been his life-work, and at last cared but for Wordsworth, the one great poet who, after brief blossom, was cut and sawn into planks of obvious utility. I called upon him from time to time out of gratitude for old encouragements, and because, among the Dublin houses open to me, his alone was pleasant to the eye, with its many books and its air of scholarship. But when O'Grady had declared, rancorous for once but

under substantial provocation, that he had “a bad head and a worse heart,” I found my welcome troubled and called no more.

XIII

The one house where nobody thought or talked politics was a house in Ely Place, where a number of young men lived together, and, for want of a better name, were called Theosophists. Beside the resident members, other members dropped in and out during the day, and the reading-room was a place of much discussion about philosophy and about the arts. The house had been taken in the name of the engineer to the Board of Works, a black-bearded young man, with a passion for Manichean philosophy, and all accepted him as host; and sometimes the conversation, especially when I was there, became too ghostly for the nerves of his young and delicate wife, and he would be made angry. I remember young men struggling, with inexact terminology and insufficient learning, for some new religious conception, on which they could base their lives; and some few strange or able men.

At the top of the house lived a medical student who read Plato and took haschisch, and a young Scotchman who owned a vegetarian restaurant, and had just returned from America, where he had gone as the disciple of the Prophet Harris, and where he would soon return in the train of some new prophet. When one asked what set him on his wanderings, he told of a young Highlander, his friend in boyhood, whose cap was always plucked off at a certain twist in the road, till the fathers of the village fastened it upon his head by recommending drink and women. When he had gone, his room was inherited by an American hypnotist, who had lived among the Zuni Indians with the explorer Cushant, and told of a Zuni Indian who,

irritated by some white man's praise of telephone and telegraph, cried out, "Can they do that?" and cast above his head two handfuls of sand that burst into flame, and flamed till his head seemed wrapped in fire. He professed to talk the philosophy of the Zuni Indians, but it seemed to me the vague Platonism that all there talked, except that he spoke much of men passing in sleep into the heart of mountains; a doctrine that was presently incorporated in the mythology of the house, to send young men and women hither and thither inquiring for sacred places. On a lower floor lived a strange red-haired girl, all whose thoughts were set upon painting and poetry, conceived as abstract images like Love and Penury in the *Symposium*; and to these images she sacrificed herself with Asiatic fanaticism. The engineer had discovered her starving somewhere in an unfurnished or half-furnished room, and that she had lived for many weeks upon bread and shell-cocoa, so that her food never cost her more than a penny a day. Born into a county family, who were so haughty that their neighbours called them the Royal Family, she had quarrelled with a mad father, who had never, his tenants declared, "unscrewed the top of his flask with any man," because she wished to study art, had ran away from home, had lived for a time by selling her watch, and then by occasional stories in an Irish paper. For some weeks she had paid half-a-crown a week to some poor woman to see her to the art schools and back, for she considered it wrong for a woman to show herself in public places unattended; but of late she had been unable to afford the school fees. The engineer engaged her as a companion for his wife, and gave her money enough to begin her studies once more. She had talent and imagination, a gift for style; but, though ready to face death for painting and poetry, conceived as allegorical figures, she hated her own genius, and had not met praise and sympathy early enough to overcome the hatred. Face to face with paint and canvas, pen and paper, she saw nothing of her genius

but its cruelty, and would have scarce arrived before she would find some excuse to leave the schools for the day, if indeed she had not invented over her breakfast some occupation so laborious that she could call it a duty, and so not go at all. Most watched her in mockery, but I watched in sympathy; composition strained my nerves and spoiled my sleep; and yet, as far back as I could trace — and in Ireland we have long memories — my paternal ancestors had worked at some intellectual pursuit, while hers had shot and hunted. She could at any time, had she given up her profession, which her father had raged against, not because it was art, but because it was a profession, have returned to the common comfortable life of women. When, a little later, she had quarrelled with the engineer or his wife, and gone back to bread and shell-cocoa I brought her an offer from some Dublin merchant of fairly well paid advertisement work, which would have been less laborious than artistic creation; but she said that to draw advertisements was to degrade art, thanked me elaborately, and did not disguise her indignation. She had, I believe, returned to starvation with joy, for constant anaemia would shortly give her an argument strong enough to silence her conscience when the allegorical images glared upon her, and, apart from that, starvation and misery had a large share in her ritual of worship.

XIV

At the top of the house and at the time I remember best, in the same room with the young Scotchman, lived Mr. George Russell (A.E.), and the house and the society were divided into his adherents and those of the engineer; and I heard of some quarrelling between the factions. The rivalry was sub-conscious. Neither had willingly opposed the other in any matter of importance. The engineer had all the financial responsibility, and George

Russell was, in the eyes of the community, saint and genius. Had either seen that the question at issue was the leadership of mystical thought in Dublin, he would, I think, have given way, but the dispute seemed trivial. At the weekly meetings, anything might be discussed; no chairman called a speaker to order; an atheistic workman could denounce religion, or a pious Catholic confound theosophy with atheism; and the engineer, precise and practical, disapproved. He had an object. He wished to make converts for a definite form of belief, and here an enemy, if a better speaker, might make all the converts. He wished to confine discussion to members of the society, and had proposed in committee, I was told, a resolution on the subject; while Russell, who had refused to join my National Literary Society, because the party of Harp and Pepperpot had set limits to discussion, resisted, and at last defeated him. In a couple of years some new dispute arose; he resigned, and founded a society which drew doctrine and method from America or London; and Russell became, as he is to-day, the one masterful influence among young Dublin men and women who love religious speculation, but have no historical faith.

When Russell and I had been at the Art School six or seven years before, he had been almost unintelligible. He had seemed incapable of coherent thought, and perhaps was so at certain moments. The idea came upon him, he has told me, that, if he spoke he would reveal that he had lost coherence; and for the three days that the idea lasted spent the hours of daylight wandering upon the Dublin mountains, that he might escape the necessity for speech. I used to listen to him at that time, mostly walking through the streets at night, for the sake of some stray sentence, beautiful and profound, amid many words that seemed without meaning; and there were others, too, who walked and listened, for he had become, I think, to all his fellow students, sacred, as the fool is sacred in the East. We copied the model

laboriously, but he would draw without research into the natural form, and call his study “St. John in the Wilderness”; but I can remember the almost scared look and the half-whisper of a student, now a successful sculptor, who said, pointing to the modelling of a shoulder, “That is too easy, a great deal too easy!” For with brush and pencil he was too coherent.

We derided each other, told absurd tales to one another’s discredit, but we never derided him, or told tales to his discredit. He stood outside the sense of comedy his friend John Eglinton has called “the social cement” of our civilization; and we would “gush” when we spoke of him, as men do when they praise something incomprehensible. But when he painted there was no difficulty in comprehending. How could that ease and rapidity of composition, so far beyond anything that we could attain to, belong to a man whose words seemed often without meaning?

A few months before I had come to Ireland he had sent me some verses, which I had liked till Edwin Ellis had laughed me from my liking by proving that no line had a rhythm that agreed with any other, and that, the moment one thought he had settled upon some scheme of rhyme, he would break from it without reason. But now his verse was clear in thought and delicate in form. He wrote without premeditation or labour. It had, as it were, organized itself, and grown as nervous and living as if it had, as Dante said of his own work, paled his cheek. The Society he belonged to published a little magazine, and he had asked the readers to decide whether they preferred his prose or his verse, and it was because they so willed it that he wrote the little transcendental verses afterwards published in *Homeward Songs by the Way*.

Life was not expensive in that house, where, I think, no meat was eaten; I know that out of the sixty or seventy pounds a year which he earned as accountant in a Dublin shop, he saved a considerable portion for his private

charity; and it was, I think, his benevolence that gave him his lucidity of speech, and, perhaps, of writing. If he convinced himself that any particular activity was desirable in the public interest or in that of his friends, he had at once the ardour that came to another from personal ambition. He was always surrounded with a little group of infirm or unlucky persons, whom he explained to themselves and to others, turning cat to griffin, goose to swan. In later years he was to accept the position of organizer of a co-operative banking system, before he had even read a book upon economics or finance, and within a few months to give evidence before a Royal Commission upon the system, as an acknowledged expert, though he had brought to it nothing but his impassioned versatility.

At the time I write of him, he was the religious teacher, and that alone — his painting, his poetry, and his conversation all subservient to that one end. Men watched him with awe or with bewilderment; it was known that he saw visions continually, perhaps more continually than any modern man since Swedenborg; and when he painted and drew in pastel what he had seen, some accepted the record without hesitation, others, like myself, noticing the academic Graeco-Roman forms, and remembering his early admiration for the works of Gustave Moreau, divined a subjective element, but no one doubted his word. One might not think him a good observer, but no one could doubt that he reported with the most scrupulous care what he believed himself to have seen; nor did he lack occasional objective corroboration. Walking with some man in his park — his demesne, as we say in Ireland — he had seen a visionary church at a particular spot, and the man had dug and uncovered its foundations; then some woman had met him with, “Oh, Mr Russell, I am so unhappy,” and he had replied, “You will be perfectly happy this evening at seven o’clock,” and left her to her blushes. She had an appointment with a young man for seven o’clock. I had

heard of this a day or so after the event, and I asked him about it, and was told it had suddenly come into his head to use those words; but why he did not know. He and I often quarrelled, because I wanted him to examine and question his visions, and write them out as they occurred; and still more because I thought symbolic what he thought real like the men and women that had passed him on the road. Were they so much a part of his sub-conscious life that they would have vanished had he submitted them to question; were they like those voices that only speak, those strange sights that only show themselves for an instant, when the attention has been withdrawn; that phantasmagoria of which I had learnt something in London: and had his verse and his painting a like origin? And was that why the same hand that painted a certain dreamy, lovely sandy shore, now in the Dublin Municipal Gallery, could with great rapidity fill many canvases with poetical commonplace; and why, after writing *Homeward Songs by the Way*, where all is skilful and much exquisite, he would never again write a perfect book? Was it precisely because in Swedenborg alone the conscious and the sub-conscious became one, as in that marriage of the angels, which he has described as a contact of the whole being, that Coleridge thought Swedenborg both man and woman?

Russell's influence, which was already great, had more to support it than his versatility, or the mystery that surrounded him, for his sense of justice, and the daring that came from his own confidence in it, had made him the general counsellor. He would give endless time to a case of conscience, and no situation was too difficult for his clarity; and certainly some of the situations were difficult. I remember his being summoned to decide between two ladies who had quarrelled about a vacillating admirer, and called each other, to each other's faces, the worst names in our somewhat anaemic modern vocabulary; and I have heard of his success on an occasion

when I think no other but Dostoievsky's idiot could have avoided offence. The Society was very young, and, as its members faced the world's moral complexities as though they were the first that ever faced them, they drew up very vigorous rules. One rule was that if any member saw a fault growing upon any other member, it was his duty to point it out to that member. A certain young man become convinced that a certain young woman had fallen in love with him; and, as an unwritten rule pronounced love and the spiritual life incompatible, that was a heavy fault. As the young man felt the delicacy of the situation, he asked for Russell's help, and side by side they braved the offender, who, I was told, received their admonishment with surprised humility, and promised amendment. His voice would often become high, and lose its self-possession during intimate conversation, and I especially could put him in a rage; but the moment the audience became too large for intimacy, or some exciting event had given formality to speech, he would be at the same moment impassioned and impersonal. He had, and has, the capacity, beyond that of any man I have known, to put with entire justice not only the thoughts, but the emotions, of the most opposite parties and personalities, as it were dissolving some public or private uproar into drama by Corneille or by Racine; and men who have hated each other must sometimes have been reconciled, because each heard his enemy's argument put into better words than he himself had found for his own; and this gift was in later years to give him political influence, and win him respect from Irish Nationalist and Unionist alike. It was, perhaps, because of it, joined to a too literal acceptance of those noble images of moral tradition which are so like late Graeco-Roman statues, that he had seen all human life as a mythological system, where, though all cats are griffins, the more dangerous griffins are only found among politicians he has not spoken to, or among authors he has but glanced at; while those

men and women who bring him their confessions and listen to his advice, carry but the snowiest of swan's plumage. Nor has it failed to make him, as I think, a bad literary critic; demanding plays and poems where the characters must attain a stature of seven feet, and resenting as something perverse and morbid all abatement from that measure. I sometimes wonder what he would have been had he not met in early life the poetry of Emerson and Walt Whitman, writers who have begun to seem superficial precisely because they lack the Vision of evil; and those translations of the Upanishads, which it is so much harder to study by the sinking flame of Indian tradition than by the serviceable lamp of Emerson and Walt Whitman.

We are never satisfied with the maturity of those whom we have admired in boyhood; and, because we have seen their whole circle — even the most successful life is but a segment — we remain to the end their harshest critics. One old schoolfellow of mine will never believe that I have fulfilled the promise of some rough unscannable verses that I wrote before I was eighteen. Does any imaginative man find in maturity the admiration that his first half-articulate years aroused in some little circle; and is not the first success the greatest? Certainly, I demanded of Russell some impossible things, and if I had any influence upon him — and I have little doubt that I had, for we were very intimate — it may not have been a good influence for I thought there could be no aim for poet or artist except expression of a "Unity of Being" like that of a "perfectly proportioned human body" — though I would not at the time have used that phrase. I remember that I was ironic and indignant when he left the Art Schools because his "will was weak, and must grow weaker if he followed any emotional pursuit;" as, later, when he let the readers of a magazine decide between his prose and his verse. I now know that there are men who cannot possess "Unity of

Being," who must not seek it or express it — and who, so far from seeking an anti-self, a Mask that delineates a being in all things the opposite to their natural state, can but seek the suppression of the anti-self, till the natural state alone remains. These are those who must seek no image of desire, but await that which lies beyond their mind, unities not of the mind, but unities of nature, unities of God: the man of science, the moralist, the humanitarian, the politician, St. Simon Stylites upon his pillar, St. Antony in his cavern; all whose pre-occupation is to know themselves for fragments, and at last for nothing; to hollow their hearts out till they are void and without form, to summon a creator by revealing chaos, to become the lamp for another's wick and oil; and indeed it may be that it has been for their guidance in a very special sense that the "perfectly proportioned human body" suffered crucifixion. For them Mask and Image are of necessity morbid, turning their eyes upon themselves, as though they were of those who can be law unto themselves, of whom Chapman has written, "Neither is it lawful that they should stoop to any other law," whereas they are indeed of those who can but ask, "Have I behaved as well as So-and-so?" "Am I a good man according to the commandments?" or, "Do I realise my own nothingness before God?" "Have my experiments and observations excluded the personal factor with sufficient rigour?" Such men do not assume wisdom or beauty as Shelley did, when he masked himself as Ahasuerus, or as Prince Athanais, nor do they pursue an Image through a world that had else seemed an uninhabitable wilderness till, amid the privations of that pursuit, the Image is no more named Pandemos, but Urania; for such men must cast all Masks away and fly the Image, till that Image, transfigured because of their cruelties of self-abasement, becomes itself some Image or epitome of the whole natural or supernatural world, and itself pursues. The wholeness of the supernatural world can only

express itself in personal form, because it has no epitome but man, nor can *The Hound of Heaven* fling itself into any but an empty heart. We may know the fugitives from others poets because, like George Herbert, like Francis Thompson, like George Russell, their imaginations grow more vivid in the expression of something which they have not themselves created, some historical religion or cause. But if the fugitive should live, as I think Russell does at times, as it is natural for a Morris or a Henley or a Shelley to live, hunters and pursuers all, his art surrenders itself to moral or poetical commonplace, to a repetition of thoughts and images that have no relation to experience.

I think that Russell would not have disappointed even my hopes had he, instead of meeting as an impressionable youth with our modern subjective romanticism, met with some form of traditional belief, which condemned all that romanticism admires and praises, indeed, all images of desire; for such condemnation would have turned his intellect towards the images of his vision. It might, doubtless, have embittered his life, for his strong intellect would have been driven out into the impersonal deeps where the man shudders; but it would have kept him a religious teacher, and set him, it may be, among the greatest of that species; politics, for a vision-seeking man, can be but half achievement, a choice of an almost easy kind of skill instead of that kind which is, of all those not impossible, the most difficult. Is it not certain that the Creator yawns in earthquake and thunder and other popular displays, but toils in rounding the delicate spiral of a shell?

XV

I heard the other day of a Dublin man recognizing in London an elderly man who had lived in that house in Ely Place in his youth, and of that

elderly man, at the sudden memory, bursting into tears. Though I have no such poignant memories, for I was never of it, never anything but a dissatisfied critic, yet certain vivid moments come back to me as I write.

...Russell has just come in from a long walk on the Two Rock mountain, very full of his conversation with an old religious beggar, who kept repeating, "God possesses the heavens, but He covets the earth — He covets the earth."

……

I get in talk with a young man who has taken the orthodox side in some debate. He is a stranger, but explains that he has inherited magical art from his father, and asks me to his rooms to see it in operation. He and a friend of his kill a black cock, and burn herbs in a big bowl, but nothing happens except that the friend repeats again and again, "Oh, my God," and when I ask him why he has said that, does not know that he has spoken; and I feel that there is something very evil in the room.

……

We are sitting round the fire one night, and a member, a woman, tells a dream that she has just had. She dreamed that she saw monks digging in a garden. They dug down till they found a coffin, and when they took off the lid she saw that in the coffin lay a beautiful young man in a dress of gold brocade. The young man railed against the glory of the world, and when he had finished, the monks closed the coffin reverently, and buried it once more. They smoothed the ground, and then went on with their gardening.

……

I have a young man with me, an official of the National Literary Society, and I leave him in the reading-room with Russell, while I go upstairs to see the young Scotchman. I return after some minutes to find that the young man has become a Theosophist, but a month later, after an interview with a

friar, to whom he gives an incredible account of his new beliefs, he goes to Mass again.

BOOK III: HODOS CAMELIONIS

I

When staying with Hyde in Roscommon, I had driven over to Lough Kay, hoping to find some local memory of the old story of Tumaus Costello, which I was turning into a story now called *Proud Costello, Macdermot's Daughter, and the Bitter Tongue*. I was rowed up the lake that I might find the island where he died; I had to find it from Hyde's account in *The Love-Songs of Connaught*, for when I asked the boatman, he told the story of Hero and Leander, putting Hero's house on one island, and Leander's on another. Presently we stopped to eat our sandwiches at the "Castle Rock," an island all castle. It was not an old castle, being but the invention of some romantic man, seventy or eighty years ago. The last man who had lived there had been Dr. Hyde's father, and he had but stayed a fortnight. The Gaelic-speaking men in the district were accustomed, instead of calling some specially useless thing a "white elephant," to call it "The Castle on the Rock." The roof was, however, still sound, and the windows unbroken. The situation in the centre of the lake, that has little wood-grown islands, and is surrounded by wood-grown hills, is romantic, and at one end, and perhaps at the other too, there is a stone platform where meditative persons might pace to and fro. I planned a mystical Order which should buy or hire the castle, and keep it as a place where its members could retire for a while for contemplation, and where we might establish mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samothrace; and for ten years to come my most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find philosophy and to create ritual for that Order. I had an unshakeable conviction, arising how or whence I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would

find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature, and set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian, centuries.

I thought that for a time I could rhyme of love, calling it *The Rose*, because of the Rose's double meaning; of a fisherman who had "never a crack" in his heart; of an old woman complaining of the idleness of the young, or of some cheerful fiddler, all those things that "popular poets" write of, but that I must some day, on that day when the gates began to open, become difficult or obscure. With a rhythm that still echoed Morris I prayed to the Red Rose, to Intellectual Beauty:

"Come near, come near, come near — ah, leave me still
A little space for the Rose-breath to fill,
Lest I no more hear common things....
But seek alone to hear the strange things said
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,
And learn to chant a tongue men do not know."

I do not remember what I meant by "the bright hearts," but a little later I wrote of Spirits "with mirrors in their hearts."

My rituals were not to be made deliberately, like a poem, but all got by that method Mathers had explained to me, and with this hope I plunged without a clue into a labyrinth of images, into that labyrinth that we are warned against in those *Oracles* which antiquity has attributed to Zoroaster, but modern scholarship to some Alexandrian poet. "Stoop not down to the

darkly splendid world wherein lieth continually a faithless depth and Hades wrapped in cloud, delighting in unintelligible images."

II

I found a supporter at Sligo in my elderly uncle, a man of fifty-three or fifty-four, with the habits of a much older man. He had never left the West of Ireland, except for a few days to London every year, and a single fortnight's voyage to Spain on board a trading schooner, in his boyhood. He was in politics a Unionist and Tory of the most obstinate kind, and knew nothing of Irish literature or history. He was, however, strangely beset by the romance of Ireland, as he discovered it among the people who served him, sailing upon his ships or attending to his horses, and, though narrow and obstinate of opinion, and puritanical in his judgment of life, was perhaps the most tolerant man I have ever known. He never expected anybody to agree with him, and if you did not upset his habits by cheating him over a horse, or by offending his taste, he would think as well of you as he did of other men, and that was not very well; and help you out of any scrape whatever. I was accustomed to people much better read than he, much more liberal-minded, but they had no life but the intellectual life, and if they and I differed, they could not take it lightly, and were often angry, and so for years now I had gone to Sligo, sometimes because I could not afford my Dublin lodging, but most often for freedom and peace. He would receive me with "I have learned that your friend So and So has been seen at the Gresham Hotel talking to Mr William Redmond. What will not people do for notoriety?" He considered all Irish Nationalist Members of Parliament as outside the social pale, but after dinner, when conversation grew intimate, would talk sympathetically of the Fenians in Ballina, where

he spent his early manhood, or of the Fenian privateer that landed the wounded man at Sligo in the ‘sixties. When Parnell was contesting an election at Sligo a little before his death, other Unionist magistrates refused or made difficulties when asked for some assistance, what I do not remember, made necessary under election law; and so my uncle gave that assistance. He walked up and down some Town Hall assembly-room or some courtroom with Parnell, but would tell me nothing of that conversation, except that Parnell spoke of Gladstone with extravagant hatred. He would not repeat words spoken by a great man in his bitterness, yet Parnell at the moment was too angry to care who listened. I knew one other man who kept as firm a silence; he had attended Parnell’s last public meeting, and after it sat alone beside him, and heard him speak of the followers that had fallen away, or were showing their faint hearts; but Parnell was the chief devotion of his life.

When I first began my visits, he had lived in the town itself, and close to a disreputable neighbourhood called the Burrough, till one evening, while he sat over his dinner, he heard a man and woman quarrelling under his window. “I mind the time,” shouted the man, “when I slept with you and your daughter in the one bed.” My uncle was horrified, and moved to a little house about a quarter of a mile into the country, where he lived with an old second-sighted servant, and a man-servant to look after the racehorse that was browsing in the neighbouring field, with a donkey to keep it company. His furniture had not been changed since he set up house for himself as a very young man, and in a room opposite his dining-room were the saddles of his youth, and though he would soon give up riding, they would be oiled and the stirrups kept clean and bright till the day of his death. Some love-affair had gone wrong when he was a very young man; he had now no interest in women; certainly never sought favour of a woman, and yet he

took great care of his appearance. He did not let his beard grow, though he had, or believed that he had, for he was hypochondriacal, a sensitiveness of the skin that forced him to spend an hour in shaving, and he would take to club and dumb-bell if his waist thickened by a hair's breadth, and twenty years after, when a very old man, he had the erect shapely figure of his youth. I often wondered why he went through so much labour, for it was not pride, which had seemed histrionic in his eyes — and certainly he had no vanity; and now, looking back, I am convinced that it was from habit, mere habit, a habit formed when he was a young man, and the best rider of his district.

Probably through long association with Mary Battle, the second-sighted servant, he had come to believe much in the supernatural world, and would tell how several times, arriving home with an unexpected guest, he had found the table set for three, and that he himself had dreamed of his brother's illness in Liverpool before he had other news of it. He saw me using images learned from Mathers to start reverie, and, though I held out for a long time, thinking him too old and habit-bound, he persuaded me to tell him their use, and from that on we experimented continually, and after a time I began to keep careful record. In summer he always had the same little house at Rosses Point, and it was there that he first became sensitive to the cabalistic symbols. There are some high sandhills and low cliffs, and I adopted the practice of walking by the seashore while he walked on cliff or sandhill; I, without speaking, would imagine the symbol, and he would notice what passed before his mind's eye, and in a short time he would practically never fail of the appropriate vision. In the symbols which are used certain colours are classified as "actives," while certain other colours are "passives," and I had soon discovered that if I used "actives" George Pollexfen would see nothing. I therefore gave him exercises to make him

sensitive to those colours, and gradually we found ourselves well fitted for this work, and he began to take as lively an interest, as was possible to a nature given over to habit, in my plans for the Castle on the Rock.

I worked with others, sworn to the scheme for the most part, and I made many curious observations. It was the symbol itself, or, at any rate, not my conscious intention that produced the effect, for if I made an error and told someone, let us say, to gaze at the wrong symbol — they were painted upon cards — the vision would be suggested by the symbol, not by my thought, or two visions would appear side by side, one from the symbol and one from my thought. When two people, between whose minds there was even a casual sympathy, worked together under the same symbolic influence, the dream or reverie would divide itself between them, each half being the complement of the other; and now and again these complementary dreams, or reveries, would arise spontaneously. I find, for instance, in an old notebook, "I saw quite suddenly a tent with a wooden badly-carved idol, painted dull red; a man looking like a Red Indian was prostrate before it. The idol was seated to the left. I asked G. what he saw. He saw a most august immense being, glowing with a ruddy opalescent colour, sitting on a throne to the left", or, to summarise from a later notebook,... I am meditating in one room and my fellow-student in another, when I see a boat full of tumult and movement on a still sea, and my friend sees a boat with motionless sails upon a tumultuous sea. There was nothing in the originating symbol to suggest a boat.

We never began our work until George's old servant was in her bed; and yet, when we went upstairs to our beds, we constantly heard her crying out with nightmare, and in the morning we would find that her dream echoed our vision. One night, started by what symbol I forget, we had seen an allegorical marriage of Heaven and Earth. When Mary Battle brought in the

breakfast next morning, I said, “Well, Mary, did you dream anything last night?” and she replied (I am quoting from an old notebook) “indeed she had,” and that it was “a dream she would not have liked to have had twice in one night.” She had dreamed that her bishop, the Catholic bishop of Sligo, had gone away “without telling anybody,” and had married “a very high-up lady,” “and she not too young, either.” She had thought in her dream, “Now all the clergy will get married, and it will be no use going to confession.” There were “layers upon layers of flowers, many roses, all round the church.”

Another time, when George Pollexfen had seen in answer to some evocation of mine a man with his head cut in two, she woke to find that she “must have cut her face with a pin, as it was all over blood.” When three or four saw together, the dream or vision would divide itself into three or four parts, each seeming complete in itself, and all fitting together, so that each part was an adaptation of a single meaning to a particular personality. A visionary being would give, let us say, a lighted torch to one, an unlighted candle to another, an unripe fruit to a third, and to the fourth a ripe fruit. At times coherent stories were built up, as if a company of actors were to improvise, and play, not only without previous consultation, but without foreseeing at any moment what would be said or done the moment after. Who made the story? Was it the mind of one of the visionaries? Perhaps, for I have endless proof that, where two worked together, the symbolic influence commonly took upon itself, though no word was spoken, the quality of the mind that had first fixed a symbol in the mind’s eye. But, if so, what part of the mind? One friend, in whom the symbolic impulse produced actual trance, described an elaborate and very strange story while the trance was upon him, but upon waking told a story that after a certain point was quite different. “They gave me a cup of wine, and after that I

remembered nothing." While speaking out of trance he had said nothing of the cup of wine, which must have been offered to a portion of his mind quite early in the dream. Then, too, from whence come the images of the dream? Not always, I was soon persuaded, from the memory, perhaps never in trance or sleep. One man, who certainly thought that Eve's apple was the sort that you got from the greengrocer, and as certainly never doubted its story's literal truth, said, when I used some symbol to send him to Eden, that he saw a walled garden on the top of a high mountain, and in the middle of it a tree with great birds in the branches, and fruit out of which, if you held a fruit to your ear, came the sound of fighting. I had not at the time read Dante's *Purgatorio*, and it caused me some trouble to verify the mountain garden, and, from some passage in the Zohar, the great birds among the boughs; while a young girl, on being sent to the same garden, heard "the music of heaven" from a tree, and on listening with her ear against the trunk, found that it was made by the "continual clashing of swords." Whence came that fine thought of music-making swords, that image of the garden, and many like images and thoughts? I had as yet no clear answer, but knew myself face to face with the Anima Mundi described by Platonic philosophers, and more especially in modern times by Henry More, which has a memory independent of individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and their thoughts.

III

At Sligo we walked twice every day, once after lunch and once after dinner, to the same gate on the road to Knocknarea; and at Rosses Point, to the same rock upon the shore; and as we walked we exchanged those thoughts that never rise before me now without bringing some sight of

mountain or of shore. Considering that Mary Battle received our thoughts in sleep, though coarsened or turned to caricature, do not the thoughts of the scholar or the hermit, though they speak no word, or something of their shape and impulse, pass into the general mind? Does not the emotion of some woman of fashion, caught in the subtle torture of self-analysing passion, pass down, although she speak no word, to Joan with her Pot, Jill with her Pail and, it may be, with one knows not what nightmare melancholy to Tom the Fool?

Seeing that a vision could divide itself in divers complementary portions, might not the thought of philosopher or poet or mathematician depend at every moment of its progress upon some complementary thought in minds perhaps at a great distance? Is there nation-wide multiform reverie, every mind passing through a stream of suggestion, and all streams acting and reacting upon one another, no matter how distant the minds, how dumb the lips? A man walked, as it were, casting a shadow, and yet one could never say which was man and which was shadow, or how many the shadows that he cast. Was not a nation, as distinguished from a crowd of chance comers, bound together by these parallel streams or shadows; that Unity of Image, which I sought in national literature, being but an originating symbol?

From the moment when these speculations grew vivid, I had created for myself an intellectual solitude, most arguments that could influence action had lost something of their meaning. How could I judge any scheme of education, or of social reform, when I could not measure what the different classes and occupations contributed to that invisible commerce of reverie and of sleep; and what is luxury and what necessity when a fragment of gold braid, or a flower in the wallpaper may be an originating impulse to revolution or to philosophy? I began to feel myself not only solitary but helpless.

IV

I had not taken up these subjects wilfully, nor through love of strangeness, nor love of excitement, nor because I found myself in some experimental circle, but because unaccountable things had happened even in my childhood, and because of an ungovernable craving. When supernatural events begin, a man first doubts his own testimony, but when they repeat themselves again and again, he doubts all human testimony. At least he knows his own bias, and may perhaps allow for it, but how trust historian and psychologist that have for two hundred years ignored in writing of the history of the world, or of the human mind, so momentous a part of human experience? What else had they ignored and distorted? When Mesmerists first travelled about as public entertainers, a favourite trick was to tell a mesmerised man that some letter of the alphabet had ceased to exist, and after that to make him write his name upon the blackboard. Brown, or Jones, or Robinson would become upon the instant, and without any surprise or hesitation, Rown, or Ones, or Obinson.

Was modern civilisation a conspiracy of the sub-conscious? Did we turn away from certain thoughts and things because the Middle Ages lived in terror of the dark, or had some seminal illusion been imposed upon us by beings greater than ourselves for an unknown purpose? Even when no facts of experience were denied, might not what had seemed logical proof be but a mechanism of change, an automatic impulse? Once in London, at a dinner party, where all the guests were intimate friends, I had written upon a piece of paper, “In five minutes York Powell will talk of a burning house,” thrust the paper under my neighbour’s plate, and imagined my fire symbol, and waited in silence. Powell shifted conversation from topic to topic and

within the five minutes was describing a fire he had seen as a young man. When Locke's French translator Coste asked him how, if there were no "innate ideas," he could explain the skill shown by a bird in making its nest, Locke replied, "I did not write to explain the actions of dumb creatures," and his translator thought the answer "very good, seeing that he had named his book *A Philosophical Essay upon Human Understanding*." Henry More, upon the other hand, considered that the bird's instinct proved the existence of the Anima Mundi, with its ideas and memories. Did modern enlightenment think with Coste that Locke had the better logic, because it was not free to think otherwise?

V

I ceased to read modern books that were not books of belief older than any European Church, and founded that interested me, I tried to trace it back to its earliest use, believing that there must be a tradition of belief older than any European Church, and founded upon the experience of the world before the modern bias. It was this search for a tradition that urged George Pollexfen and myself to study the visions and thoughts of the country people, and some country conversation repeated by one or the other often gave us a day's discussion. These visions, we soon discovered, were very like those we called up by symbol. Mary Battle, looking out of the window at Rosses Point, saw coming from Knocknarea, where Queen Maeve, according to local folklore, is buried under a great heap of stones, "the finest woman you ever saw travelling right across from the mountains and straight to here." — I quote a record written at the time. "She looked very strong, but not wicked" (that is to say, not cruel). "I have seen the Irish Giant" (some big man shown at a fair). "And though he was a fine man he

was nothing to her, for he was round and could not have stepped out so soldierly ... she had no stomach on her but was slight and broad in the shoulders, and was handsomer than any one you ever saw; she looked about thirty." And when I asked if she had seen others like her, she said, "Some of them have their hair down, but they look quite different, more like the sleepy-looking ladies one sees in the papers. Those with their hair up are like this one. The others have long white dresses, but those with their hair up have short dresses, so that you can see their legs right up to the calf." And when I questioned her, I found that they wore what might well be some kind of buskin. "They are fine and dashing-looking, like the men one sees riding their horses in twos and threes on the slopes of the mountains with their swords swinging. There is no such race living now, none so finely proportioned ... When I think of her and the ladies now they are like little children running about not knowing how to put their clothes on right ... why, I would not call them women at all."

Not at this time, but some three or four years later, when the visions came without any conscious use of symbol for a short time, and with much greater vividness, I saw two or three forms of this incredible beauty, one especially that must always haunt my memory. Then, too, the Master Pilot told us of meeting at night close to the Pilot House a procession of women in what seemed the costume of another age. Were they really people of the past, revisiting, perhaps, the places where they lived, or must I explain them, as I explained that vision of Eden as a mountain garden, by some memory of the race, as distinct from individual memory? Certainly these Spirits, as the country people called them, seemed full of personality; were they not capricious, generous, spiteful, anxious, angry, and yet did that prove them more than images and symbols? When I used a combined earth and fire and lunar symbol, my seer, a girl of twenty-five, saw an obvious

Diana and her dogs, about a fire in a cavern. Presently, judging from her closed eyes, and from the tone of her voice, that she was in trance, not in reverie, I wished to lighten the trance a little, and made through carelessness or hasty thinking a symbol of dismissal; and at once she started and cried out, "She says you are driving her away too quickly. You have made her angry." Then, too, if my visions had a subjective element, so had Mary Battle's, for her fairies had but one tune, *The Distant Waterfall*, and she never heard anything described in a sermon at the Cathedral that she did not "see it after," and spoke of seeing in this way the gates of Purgatory.

Furthermore, if my images could affect her dreams, the folk-images could affect mine in turn, for one night I saw between sleeping and waking a strange long bodied pair of dogs, one black and one white, that I found presently in some country tale. How, too, could one separate the dogs of the country tale from those my uncle heard bay in his pillow? In order to keep myself from nightmare, I had formed the habit of imagining four watch-dogs, one at each corner of my room, and, though I had not told him or anybody, he said, "Here is a very curious thing; most nights now, when I lay my head upon the pillow, I hear a sound of dogs baying — the sound seems to come up out of the pillow." A friend of Strindberg's, in *delirium tremens*, was haunted by mice, and a friend in the next room heard the squealing of the mice.

VI

To that multiplicity of interest and opinion, of arts and sciences, which had driven me to conceive a Unity of Culture defined and evoked by Unity of Image, I had but added a multiplicity of images, and I was the more troubled because, the first excitement over, I had done nothing to rouse

George Pollexfen from the gloom and hypochondria always thickening about him. I asked no help of books, for I believed that the truth I sought would come to me like the subject of a poem, from some moment of passionate experience, and that if I filled my exposition with other men's thought, other men's investigation, I would sink into all that multiplicity of interest and opinion. That passionate experience could never come — of that I was certain — until I had found the right image or right images. From what but the image of Apollo, fixed always in memory and passion, did his priesthood get that occasional power, a classical historian has described, of lifting great stones and snapping great branches; and did not Gemma Galgani, like many others that had gone before, in 1889 cause deep wounds to appear in her body by contemplating her crucifix? In the essay that Wilde read to me one Christmas Day, occurred these words — "What does not the world owe to the imitation of Christ, what to the imitation of Caesar?" and I had seen Macgregor Mathers paint little pictures combining the forms of men, animals, and birds, according to a rule which provided a form for every possible mental condition, and I had heard him describing, upon what authority I do not remember, how citizens of ancient Egypt assumed, when in contemplation, the images of their gods.

But now image called up image in an endless procession, and I could not always choose among them with any confidence; and when I did choose, the image lost its intensity, or changed into some other image. I had but exchanged the Temptation of Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pecuchet* for that of his *St. Anthony*, and I was lost in that region a cabalistic manuscript, shown me by Macgregor Mathers, had warned me of; astray upon the Path of the Cameleon, upon *Hodos Camelionis*.

VII

Now that I am a settled man and have many birds — the canaries have just hatched out four nestlings — I have before me the problem that Locke waved aside. As I gave them an artificial nest, a hollow vessel like a saucer, they had no need of that skill the wild bird shows, each species having its own preference among the lichen, or moss; but they could sort out wool and hair and a certain soft white down that I found under a big tree. They would twist a stem of grass till it was limber, and would wind it all about the centre of the nest, and when the four grey eggs were laid, the mother bird knew how to turn them over from time to time, that they might be warmed evenly; and how long she must leave them uncovered, that the white might not be dried up, and when to return that the growing bird might not take cold. Then the young birds, even when they had all their feathers, were very still as compared with the older birds, as though any habit of movement would disturb the nest or make them tumble out. One of them would now and again pass on the food that he had received from his mother's beak to some other nestling. The father had often pecked the mother bird before the eggs were laid, but now, until the last nestling was decently feathered, he took his share in the feeding, and was very peaceable, and it was only when the young could be left to feed themselves that he grew jealous and had to be put into another cage.

When I watch my child, who is not yet three years old, I can see so many signs of knowledge from beyond her own mind; why else should she be so excited when a little boy passes outside the window, and take so little interest in a girl; why should she put a cloak about her, and look over her shoulder to see it trailing upon the stairs, as she will some day trail a dress; and why, above all, as she lay against her mother's side, and felt the unborn child moving within, did she murmur, "Baby, baby?"

When a man writes any work of genius, or invents some creative action, is it not because some knowledge or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind? It is called up by an image, as I think; all my birds' adventures started when I hung a little saucer at one side of the cage, and at the other a bundle of hair and grass; but our images must be given to us, we cannot choose them deliberately.

VIII

I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind. There are, indeed, personifying spirits that we had best call but Gates and Gate-keepers, because through their dramatic power they bring our souls to crisis, to Mask and Image, caring not a straw whether we be Juliet going to her wedding, or Cleopatra to her death; for in their eyes nothing has weight but passion. We have dreamed a foolish dream these many centuries in thinking that they value a life of contemplation, for they scorn that more than any possible life, unless it be but a name for the worst crisis of all. They have but one purpose, to bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle he may confront without despair. They contrived Dante's banishment, and snatched away his Beatrice, and thrust Villon into the arms of harlots, and sent him to gather cronies at the foot of the gallows, that Dante and Villon might through passion become conjoint to their buried selves, turn all to Mask and Image, and so be phantoms in their own eyes. In great lesser writers like Landor and like Keats we are shown that Image and that Mask as something set apart; Andromeda and her Perseus —

though not the sea-dragon — but in a few in whom we recognise supreme masters of tragedy, the whole contest is brought into the circle of their beauty. Such masters, Villon and Dante, let us say, would not, when they speak through their art, change their luck; yet they are mirrored in all the suffering of desire. The two halves of their nature are so completely joined that they seem to labour for their objects, and yet to desire whatever happens, being at the same instant predestinate and free, creation's very self. We gaze at such men in awe, because we gaze not at a work of art, but at the re-creation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and, it may even seem that the hairs of our heads stand up, because that birth, that re-creation, is from terror. Had not Dante and Villon understood that their fate wrecked what life could not rebuild, had they lacked their Vision of Evil, had they cherished any species of optimism, they could but have found a false beauty, or some momentary instinctive beauty, and suffered no change at all, or but changed as do the wild creatures, or from devil well to devil sick, and so round the clock.

They and their sort alone earn contemplation, for it is only when the intellect has wrought the whole of life to drama, to crisis, that we may live for contemplation, and yet keep our intensity.

And these things are true also of nations, but the Gate-keepers who drive the nation to war or anarchy that it may find its Image are different from those who drive individual men, though I think at times they work together. And as I look backward upon my own writing, I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I have found something hard, cold, some articulation of the Image, which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life, and all that my country is; yet man or nation can no more make Mask or Image than the seed can be made by the soil into which it is cast.

Ille.

“What portion in the world can the artist have,
Who has awakened from the common dream,
But dissipation and despair?

Hic.

And yet
No one denies to Keats, love of the world.
Remember his deliberate happiness.

Ille.

His art is happy, but who knows his mind?
I see a schoolboy, when I think of him,
With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window.
For certainly he sank into his grave
His senses and his heart unsatisfied,
And made, being poor, ailing, and ignorant....
Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
Luxuriant song.”

BOOK IV: THE TRAGIC GENERATION

I

Two or three years after our return to Bedford Park *The Doll's House* had been played at the Royalty Theatre in Dean Street, the first Ibsen play to be played in England, and somebody had given me a seat for the gallery. In the middle of the first act, while the heroine was asking for macaroons, a middle-aged washerwoman who sat in front of me, stood up and said to the little boy at her side, "Tommy, if you promise to go home straight, we will go now;" and at the end of the play, as I wandered through the entrance hall, I heard an elderly critic murmur, "A series of conversations terminated by an accident." I was divided in mind, I hated the play; what was it but Carolus Durand, Bastien-Lepage, Huxley and Tyndall, all over again; I resented being invited to admire dialogue so close to modern educated speech that music and style were impossible.

"Art is art because it is not nature," I kept repeating to myself, but how could I take the same side with critic and washerwoman? As time passed Ibsen became in my eyes the chosen author of very clever young journalists, who, condemned to their treadmill of abstraction, hated music and style; and yet neither I nor my generation could escape him because, though we and he had not the same friends, we had the same enemies. I bought his collected works in Mr. Archer's translation out of my thirty shillings a week and carried them to and fro upon my journeys to Ireland and Sligo, and Florence Farr, who had but one great gift, the most perfect poetical elocution, became prominent as an Ibsen actress and had almost a success in *Rosmersholm*, where there is symbolism and a stale odour of spoilt poetry. She and I and half our friends found ourselves involved in a quarrel with the supporters of old fashioned melodrama, and conventional

romance, and in the support of the new dramatists who wrote in what the Daily Press chose to consider the manner of Ibsen. In 1894 she became manageress of the Avenue Theatre with a play of Dr. Todhunter's, called *The Comedy of Sighs*, and Mr Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. She asked me to write a one act play for her niece, Miss Dorothy Paget, a girl of eight or nine, to make her first stage appearance in; and I, with my Irish Theatre in mind, wrote *The Land of Heart's Desire*, in some discomfort when the child was theme, as I knew nothing of children, but with an abundant mind when Mary Bruin was for I knew an Irish woman whose unrest troubled me and lay beyond my comprehension. When she opened her theatre she had to meet a hostile audience, almost as violent as that Synge met in January, 1907, and certainly more brutal, for the Abbey audience had no hatred for the players, and I think but little for Synge himself. Nor had she the certainty of final victory to give her courage, for *The Comedy of Sighs* was a rambling story told with a little paradoxical wit. She had brought the trouble upon herself perhaps, for always in revolt against her own poetical gift, which now seemed obsolete, and against her own Demeter-like face in the mirror, she had tried when interviewed by the Press to shock and startle — to seem to desire enemies; and yet, unsure of her own judgment being out of her own trade, had feared to begin with Shaw's athletic wit, and now outraged convention saw its chance. For two hours and a half, pit and gallery drowned the voices of the players with boos and jeers that were meant to be bitter to the author who sat visible to all in his box surrounded by his family, and to the actress struggling bravely through her weary part; and then pit and gallery went home to spread their lying story that the actress had a fit of hysterics in her dressing-room.

Todhunter had sat on to the end, and there were, I think, four acts of it, listening to the howling of his enemies, while his friends slipped out one by

one, till one saw everywhere their empty seats, but nothing could arouse the fighting instincts of that melancholy man. Next day I tried to get him to publish his book of words with satirical designs and illustrations, by Beardsley, who was just rising into fame, and an introduction attacking the public, but though petulant and irascible he was incapable of any emotion that could give life to a cause. He shared the superstition still current in the theatre, that the public wants sincere drama, but is kept from it by some conspiracy of managers or newspapers, and could not get out of his head that the actors were to blame. Shaw, whose turn came next, had foreseen all months before, and had planned an opening that would confound his enemies. For the first few minutes *Arms and the Man* is crude melodrama and then just when the audience are thinking how crude it is, it turns into excellent farce. At the dress rehearsal, a dramatist who had his own quarrel with the public, was taken in the noose; for at the first laugh he stood up, turned his back on the stage, scowled at the audience, and even when everybody else knew what turn the play had taken, continued to scowl, and order those nearest to be silent.

On the first night the whole pit and gallery, except certain members of the Fabian Society, started to laugh at the author and then, discovering that they themselves were being laughed at, sat there not converted — their hatred was too bitter for that — but dumbfounded, while the rest of the house cheered and laughed. In the silence that greeted the author after the cry for a speech one man did indeed get his courage and boo loudly. “I assure the gentleman in the gallery,” was Shaw’s answer, “that he and I are of exactly the same opinion, but what can we do against a whole house who are of the contrary opinion?” And from that moment Bernard Shaw became the most formidable man in modern letters, and even the most drunken of medical students knew it. My own play, which had been played with *The*

Comedy of Sighs, had roused no passions, but had pleased a sufficient minority for Florence Farr to keep it upon the stage with *Arms and the Man*, and I was in the theatre almost every night for some weeks. “Oh, yes, the people seem to like *Arms and the Man*,” said one of Mr Shaw’s players to me, “but we have just found out that we are all wrong. Mr Shaw did really mean it quite seriously, for he has written a letter to say so, and we must not play for laughs any more.” Another night I found the manager, triumphant and excited, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh had been there, and the Duke of Edinburgh had spoken his dislike out loud so that the whole stalls could hear, but the Prince of Wales had been “very pleasant” and “got the Duke of Edinburgh away as soon as possible.” “They asked for me,” he went on, “and the Duke of Edinburgh kept on repeating, ‘The man is mad,’ meaning Mr Shaw, and the Prince of Wales asked who Mr Shaw was, and what he meant by it.” I myself was almost as bewildered for though I came mainly to see how my own play went, and for the first fortnight to vex my most patient actors with new lines, I listened with excitement to see how the audience would like certain passages of *Arms and the Man*. I hated it; it seemed to me inorganic, logical straightness and not the crooked road of life and I stood aghast before its energy as to-day before that of the Stone Drill by Mr. Epstein or of some design by Mr Wyndham Lewis. He was right to claim Samuel Butler for his master, for Butler was the first Englishman to make the discovery, that it is possible to write with great effect without music, without style, either good or bad, to eliminate from the mind all emotional implication and to prefer plain water to every vintage, so much metropolitan lead and solder to any tendril of the vine. Presently I had a nightmare that I was haunted by a sewing machine, that clicked and shone, but the incredible thing was that the machine smiled, smiled perpetually. Yet I delighted in Shaw the formidable man. He

could hit my enemies and the enemies of all I loved, as I could never hit, as no living author that was dear to me could ever hit.

Florence Farr's way home was mine also for a part of the way, and it was often of this that we talked, and sometimes, though not always, she would share my hesitations, and for years to come I was to wonder whenever Shaw became my topic, whether the cock crowed for my blame or for my praise.

II

Shaw and Wilde, had no catastrophe come, would have long divided the stage between them, though they were most unlike — for Wilde believed himself to value nothing but words in their emotional associations, and he had turned his style to a parade as though it were his show, and he Lord Mayor.

I was at Sligo again and I saw the announcement of his action against Lord Queensberry, when starting from my uncle's house to walk to Knocknarea to dine with Cochrane of the Glen, as he was called, to distinguish him from others of that name, an able old man. He had a relation, a poor mad girl, who shared our meals, and at whom I shuddered. She would take a flower from the vase in front of her and push it along the tablecloth towards any male guest who sat near. The old man himself had strange opinions, born not from any mental eccentricity, but from the solitude of his life; and a freedom from all prejudice that was not of his own discovery. "The world is getting more manly," he would say, "it has begun to drink port again," or "Ireland is going to become prosperous. Divorced couples now choose Ireland for a retreat, just as before Scotland became prosperous they began to go there. There are a divorced wife and her lover

living at the other side of the mountain." I remember that I spoke that night of Wilde's kindness to myself, said I did not believe him guilty, quoted the psychologist Bain, who has attributed to every sensualist "a voluminous tenderness," and described Wilde's hard brilliance, his dominating self-possession. I considered him essentially a man of action, that he was a writer by perversity and accident, and would have been more important as soldier or politician; and I was certain that, guilty or not guilty, he would prove himself a man. I was probably excited, and did most of the talking, for if Cochrane had talked, I would have remembered an amusing sentence or two; but he was certainly sympathetic. A couple of days later I received a letter from Lionel Johnson, denouncing Wilde with great bitterness. He had "a cold scientific intellect;" he got a "sense of triumph and power; at every dinner-table he dominated, from the knowledge that he was guilty of that sin which, more than any other possible to man, would turn all those people against him if they but knew." He wrote in the mood of his poem, *To the Destroyer of a Soul*, addressed to Wilde, as I have always believed, though I know nothing of the circumstance that made him write it.

I might have known that Wilde's phantasy had taken some tragic turn, and that he was meditating upon possible disaster, but one took all his words for play — had he not called insincerity "a mere multiplication of the personality" or some such words? I had met a man who had found him in a barber's shop in Venice, and heard him explain, "I am having my hair curled that I may resemble Nero;" and when, as editor of an Irish anthology, I had asked leave to quote "Tread gently, she is near under the snow," he had written that I might do so if I pleased, but his most characteristic poem was that sonnet with the lines

"Lo! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey's romance —

And must I lose a soul's inheritance."

When in London for my play I had asked news from an actor who had seen him constantly. "He is in deep melancholy," was the answer. "He says that he tries to sleep away as much of life as possible, only leaving his bed at two or three in the afternoon, and spending the rest of the day at the Café Royal. He has written what he calls the best short story in the world, and will have it that he repeats to himself on getting out of bed and before every meal. 'Christ came from a white plain to a purple city, and as he passed through the first street, he heard voices overhead, and saw a young man lying drunk upon a window sill, "Why do you waste your soul in drunkenness?" He said. "Lord, I was a leper and You healed me, what else can I do?" A little further through the town he saw a young man following a harlot, and said, "Why do you dissolve your soul in debauchery?" and the young man answered, "Lord, I was blind, and You healed me, what else can I do?" At last in the middle of the city He saw an old man crouching, weeping upon the ground, and when He asked why he wept, the old man answered, "Lord, I was dead and You raised me into life, what else can I do but weep?"'"

Wilde published that story a little later, but spoiled it with the verbal decoration of his epoch, and I have to repeat it to myself as I first heard it, before I can see its terrible beauty. I no more doubt its sincerity than I doubt that his parade of gloom, all that late rising, and sleeping away his life, that elaborate playing with tragedy, was an attempt to escape from an emotion by its exaggeration. He had three successful plays running at once; he had been almost poor, and now, his head full of Flaubert, found himself with ten thousand a year: — "Lord, I was dead, and You raised me into life, what else can I do but weep." A comedian, he was in the hands of those dramatists who understand nothing but tragedy.

A few days after the first production of my *Land of Heart's Desire*, I had my last conversation with him. He had come into the theatre as the curtain fell upon my play, and I knew that it was to ask my pardon that he overwhelmed me with compliments; and yet I wonder if he would have chosen those precise compliments, or spoken so extravagantly, but for the turn his thoughts had taken: "Your story in *The National Observer*, *The Crucifixion of the Outcast*, is sublime, wonderful, wonderful."

Some business or other brought me to London once more and I asked various Irish writers for letters of sympathy, and I was refused by none but Edward Dowden, who gave me what I considered an irrelevant excuse — his dislike for everything that Wilde had written. I heard that Wilde was at his mother's house in Oakley Street, and I called there, but the Irish servant told me, her face drawn and tragic as in the presence of death, that he was not there, but that I could see his brother. Willie Wilde received me with, "Who are you; what do you want?" but became all friendship when I told him that I had brought letters of sympathy. He took the bundle of letters in his hand, but said, "Do these letters urge him to run away? Every friend he has is urging him to, but we have made up our minds that he must stay and take his chance." "No," I said, "I certainly do not think that he should run away, nor do those letters advise it." "Letters from Ireland," he said. "Thank you, thank you. He will be glad to get those letters, but I would keep them from him if they advised him to run away." Then he threw himself back in his chair and began to talk with incoherent emotion, and in phrases that echoed now and again his brother's style at its worst; there were tear in his eyes, and he was, I think, slightly intoxicated. "He could escape, oh, yes, he could escape — there is a yacht in the Thames, and five thousand pounds to pay his bail — well, not exactly in the Thames, but there is a yacht — oh, yes, he could escape, even if I had to inflate a balloon in the back yard

with my own hand, but he has resolved to stay, to face it out, to stand the music like Christ. You must have heard — it is not necessary to go into detail — but he and I, we have not been friends; but he came to me like a wounded stag, and I took him in." "After his release" — after the failure of his action against Lord Queensberry, I think — "Stewart Headlam engaged a room at an hotel and brought him there under another name, but the manager came up and said, 'Are you Mr. Wilde?' You know what my brother is, you know how he would answer that. He said, 'Yes, I am Oscar Wilde,' and the manager said he must not stay. The same thing happened in hotel after hotel, and at last he made up his mind to come here. It is his vanity that has brought all this disgrace upon him; they swung incense before him." He dwelt upon the rhythm of the words as his brother would have done — "They swung it before his heart." His first emotion at the thought of the letters over, he became more simple, and explained that his brother considered that his crime was not the vice itself, but that he should have brought such misery upon his wife and children, and that he was bound to accept any chance, however slight, that might reestablish his position. "If he is acquitted," he said, "he will stay out of England for a few years, and can then gather his friends about him once more — even if he is condemned he will purge his offence — but if he runs away he will lose every friend that he has." I heard later, from whom I forget now, that Lady Wilde had said, "If you stay, even if you go to prison, you will always be my son, it will make no difference to my affection, but if you go, I will never speak to you again." While I was there, some woman who had just seen him — Willie Wilde's wife, I think — came in, and threw herself in a chair, and said in an exhausted voice, "It is all right now, he has made up his mind to go to prison if necessary." Before his release, two years later, his brother and mother were dead, and a little later his wife, struck by

paralysis during his imprisonment, I think, was dead, too; and he himself, his constitution ruined by prison life, followed quickly; but I have never doubted, even for an instant, that he made the right decision, and that he owes to that decision half of his renown.

Cultivated London, that before the action against Lord Queensberry had mocked his pose and affected style, and refused to acknowledge his wit, was now full of his advocates, though I did not meet a single man who considered him innocent. One old enemy of his overtook me in the street and began to praise his audacity, his self-possession. “He has made,” he said, “of infamy a new Thermopylae.” I had written in reply to Lionel Johnson’s letter that I regretted Wilde’s downfall but not that of his imitators, but Johnson had changed with the rest. “Why do you not regret the fall of Wilde’s imitators” — I had but tried to share what I thought his opinion — “They were worthless, but should have been left to criticism.” Wilde himself was a martyr in his eyes, and when I said that tragedy might give his art a greater depth, he would not even grant a martyr’s enemies that poor merit, and thought Wilde would produce, when it was all over, some comedy exactly like the others, writing from an art where events could leave no trace. Everywhere one met writers and artists who praised his wit and eloquence in the witness box, or repeated some private saying. Willie Redmond told of finding him, to his astonishment, at the conversazione of some theatrical society, standing amid an infuriated crowd, mocking with more than all his old satirical wit the actors and their country. He had said to a well-known painter during one or other of the trials, “My poor brother writes to me that he is defending me all over London; my poor, dear brother, he could compromise a steam engine.” His brother, too, had suffered a change, for, if rumour did not wrong him, “the wounded stag” had not been at all graciously received. “Thank God my vices were decent,”

had been his comment, and refusing to sit at the same table, he had dined at some neighbouring hotel at his brother's expense. His successful brother who had scorned him for a drunken ne'er-do-well was now at his mercy, and besides, he probably shared, until tragedy awoke another self, the rage and contempt that filled the crowds in the street, and all men and women who had an over-abundant normal sexual instinct. "Wilde will never lift his head again," said the art critic, Gleeson White, "for he has against him all men of infamous life." When the verdict was announced the harlots in the street outside danced upon the pavement.

III

Somewhere about 1450, though later in some parts of Europe by a hundred years or so, and in some earlier, men attained to personality in great numbers, "Unity of Being," and became like a "perfectly proportioned human body," and as men so fashioned held places of power, their nations had it too, prince and ploughman sharing that thought and feeling. What afterwards showed for rifts and cracks were there already, but imperious impulse held all together. Then the scattering came, the seeding of the poppy, bursting of pea-pod, and for a time personality seemed but the stronger for it. Shakespeare's people make all things serve their passion, and that passion is for the moment the whole energy of their being — birds, beasts, men, women, landscape, society, are but symbols and metaphors, nothing is studied in itself, the mind is a dark well, no surface, depth only. The men that Titian painted, the men that Jongsen painted, even the men of Van Dyck, seemed at moments like great hawks at rest. In the Dublin National Gallery there hung, perhaps there still hangs, upon the same wall, a portrait of some Venetian gentleman by Strozzi, and Mr.

Sargent's painting of President Wilson. Whatever thought broods in the dark eyes of that Venetian gentleman, has drawn its life from his whole body; it feeds upon it as the flame feeds upon the candle — and should that thought be changed, his pose would change, his very cloak would rustle for his whole body thinks. President Wilson lives only in the eyes, which are steady and intent; the flesh about the mouth is dead, and the hands are dead, and the clothes suggest no movement of his body, nor any movement but that of the valet, who has brushed and folded in mechanical routine. There, all was an energy flowing outward from the nature itself; here, all is the anxious study and slight deflection of external force; there man's mind and body were predominantly subjective; here all is objective, using those words not as philosophy uses them, but as we use them in conversation.

The bright part of the moon's disk, to adopt the symbolism of a certain poem, is subjective mind, and the dark, objective mind, and we have eight and twenty Phases for our classification of mankind, and of the movement of his thought. At the first Phase — the night where there is no moonlight — all is objective, while when, upon the fifteenth night, the moon comes to the full, there is only subjective mind. The mid-renaissance could but approximate to the full moon "For there is no human life at the full or the dark," but we may attribute to the next three nights of the moon the men of Shakespeare, of Titian, of Strozzi, and of Van Dyck, and watch them grow more reasonable, more orderly, less turbulent, as the nights pass; and it is well to find before the fourth — the nineteenth moon counting from the start — a sudden change, as when a cloud becomes rain, or water freezes, for the great transitions are sudden; popular, typical men have grown more ugly and more argumentative; the face that Van Dyck called a fatal face has faded before Cromwell's warty opinionated head. Henceforth no mind made like "a perfectly proportioned human body" shall sway the public, for

great men must live in a portion of themselves, become professional and abstract; but seeing that the moon's third quarter is scarce passed, that abstraction has attained but not passed its climax, that a half, as I affirm it, of the twenty-second night still lingers, they may subdue and conquer; cherish, even, some Utopian dream; spread abstraction ever further till thought is but a film, and there is no dark depth any more, surface only. But men who belong by nature to the nights near to the full are still born, a tragic minority, and how shall they do their work when too ambitious for a private station, except as Wilde of the nineteenth Phase, as my symbolism has it, did his work. He understood his weakness, true personality was impossible, for that is born in solitude, and at his moon one is not solitary; he must project himself before the eyes of others, and, having great ambition, before some great crowd of eyes; but there is no longer any great crowd that cares for his true thought. He must humour and cajole and pose, take worn-out stage situations, for he knows that he may be as romantic as he please, so long as he does not believe in his romance, and all that he may get their ears for a few strokes of contemptuous wit in which he does believe.

We Rhymers did not humour and cajole; but it was not wholly from demerit, it was in part because of different merit, that he refused our exile. Shaw, as I understand him, has no true quarrel with his time, its moon and his almost exactly coincide. He is quite content to exchange Narcissus and his Pool for the signal box at a railway junction, where goods and travellers pass perpetually upon their logical glittering road. Wilde was a monarchist, though content that monarchy should turn demagogue for its own safety, and he held a theatre by the means whereby he held a London dinner table. "He who can dominate a London dinner table," he had boasted, "can dominate the world." While Shaw has but carried his street-corner socialist

eloquence on to the stage, and in him one discovers, in his writing and his public speech, as once — before their outline had been softened by prosperity or the passage of the years — in his clothes and in his stiff joints, the civilization that Sargent's picture has explored. Neither his crowd nor he have yet made that discovery that brought President Wilson so near his death, that the moon draws to its fourth quarter. But what happens to the individual man whose moon has come to that fourth quarter, and what to the civilization...?

I can but remember pipe music to-night, though I can half hear beyond it in the memory a weightier music, but this much at any rate is certain — the dream of my early manhood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture, is false; though it may be we can achieve it for some small circle of men and women, and there leave it till the moon bring round its century.

"The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon
The creeping cat looked up.
.....
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place;
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that her pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent
From crescent to round they range?
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,

And lifts to the changing moon
Her changing eyes.”

IV

Henley’s troubles and infirmities were growing upon him. He, too, an ambitious, formidable man, who showed alike in his practice and in his theory, in his lack of sympathy for Rossetti and Landor, for instance, that he never understood how small a fragment of our own nature can be brought to perfect expression, nor that even but with great toil, in a much divided civilization; though, doubtless, if our own Phase be right, a fragment may be an image of the whole, the moon’s still scarce crumbled image, as it were, in a glass of wine. He would be, and have all poets be, a true epitome of the whole mass, a Herrick and Dr. Johnson in the same body and because this — not so difficult before the Mermaid closed its door — is no longer possible, his work lacks music, is abstract, as even an actor’s movement can be when the thought of doing is plainer to his mind than the doing itself: the straight line from cup to lip, let us say, more plain than the hand’s own sensation weighed down by that heavy spillable cup. I think he was content, when he had called before our eyes — before the too understanding eyes of his chosen crowd — the violent burly man that he had dreamed, content with the mere suggestion, and so did not work long enough at his verses. He disliked Victor Hugo as much as he did Rossetti, and yet Rossetti’s translation from *Les Burgraves*, because of its mere technical mastery, out-sings Henley in his own song —

“My mother is dead; God’s patience wears;
It seems my Chaplain will not have done.

Love on: who cares?
Who cares? Love on.”

I can read his poetry with emotion, but I read it for some glimpse of what he might have been as Border balladist, or Cavalier, or of what he actually was, not as poet but as man. He had what Wilde lacked, even in his ruin, passion, was maybe as passionate as some great man of action, as Parnell, let us say. When he and Stevenson quarrelled, he cried over it with some woman or other, and his notorious article was but for vengeance upon Mrs. Stevenson, who had arranged for the public eye, what he considered an imaginary figure, with no resemblance to the gay companion who had founded his life, to that life’s injury, upon “The august, the immortal musketeers.” She had caused the quarrel, as he believed, and now she had robbed him over again, by blotting from the world’s memory the friend of his youth; and because he believed it I read those angry paragraphs with but deeper sympathy for the writer; and I think that the man who has left them out of Henley’s collected writings has wronged his memory, as Mrs. Stevenson wronged the memory of Stevenson.

He was no contemplative man, no pleased possessor of wooden models and paper patterns, but a great passionate man, and no friend of his would have him pictured otherwise. I saw little of him in later years, but I doubt if he was ever the same after the death of his six-year old daughter. Few passages of his verse touch me as do those few mentions of her though they lack precision of word and sound. When she is but a hope, he prays that she may have his ‘gift of life’ and his wife’s ‘gift of love,’ and when she is but a few months old he murmurs over her sleep —

When you wake in your crib,
You an inch of experience —

Vaulted about
With the wonder of darkness;
Wailing and striving
To reach from your feebleness
Something you feel
Will be good to and cherish you.

And now he commends some friend “boyish and kind, and shy,” who greeted him, and greeted his wife, “that day we brought our beautiful one to lie in the green peace” and who is now dead himself, and after that he speaks of love “turned by death to longing” and so, to an enemy.

When I spoke to him of his child’s death he said, “she was a person of genius; she had the genius of the mind, and the genius of the body.” And later I heard him talk of her as a man talks of something he cannot keep silence over because it is in all his thoughts. I can remember, too, his talking of some book of natural history he had read, that he might be able to answer her questions.

He had a house now at Mortlake on the Thames with a great ivy tod shadowing door and window, and one night there he shocked and startled a roomful of men by showing how far he could be swept beyond our reach in reveries of affection. The dull man, who had tried to put Wilde out of countenance, suddenly said to the whole room, roused by I cannot remember what incautious remark of mine made to some man at my side: “Yeats believes in magic; what nonsense.” Henley said, “No, it may not be nonsense; black magic is all the go in Paris now.” And then turning towards me with a changed sound in his voice, “It is just a game, isn’t it.” I replied, not noticing till too late his serious tone, and wishing to avoid discussion in the dull man’s company, “One has had a vision; one wants to have another, that is all.” Then Henley said, speaking in a very low voice, “I want to

know how I am to get to my daughter. I was sitting here the other night when she came into the room and played round the table and went out again. Then I saw that the door was shut and I knew that I had seen a vision." There was an embarrassed silence, and then somebody spoke of something else and we began to discuss it hurriedly and eagerly.

V

I came now to be more in London, never missing the meetings of the Rhymers' Club, nor those of the council of the Irish Literary Society, where I constantly fought out our Irish quarrels and pressed upon the unwilling Gavan Duffy the books of our new movement. The Irish members of Parliament looked upon us with some hostility because we had made it a matter of principle never to put a politician in the chair, and upon other grounds. One day, some old Irish member of Parliament made perhaps his only appearance at a gathering of members. He recited with great emotion a ballad of his own composition in the manner of Young Ireland, repeating over his sacred names, Wolfe Tone, Emmet, and Owen Roe, and mourning that new poets and new movements should have taken something of their sacredness away. The ballad had no literary merit, but I went home with a troubled conscience; and for a dozen years perhaps, till I began to see the result of our work in a deepened perception of all those things that strengthen race, that trouble remained. I had in mind that old politician as I wrote but the other day —

"Our part
To murmur name upon name
As a mother names her child."

The Rhymers had begun to break up in tragedy, though we did not know that till the play had finished. I have never found a full explanation of that tragedy; sometimes I have remembered that, unlike the Victorian poets, almost all were poor men, and had made it a matter of conscience to turn from every kind of money-making that prevented good writing, and that poverty meant strain, and for the most part, a refusal of domestic life. Then I have remembered that Johnson had private means, and that others who came to tragic ends, had wives and families. Another day I think that perhaps our form of lyric, our insistence upon emotion which has no relation to any public interest, gathered together, overwrought, unstable men; and remember the moment after that the first to go out of his mind had no lyrical gift, and that we valued him mainly because he seemed a witty man of the world; and that a little later another who seemed, alike as man and writer, dull and formless, went out of his mind, first burning poems which I cannot believe would have proved him as the one man who saw them claims, a man of genius. The meetings were always decorous and often dull; some one would read out a poem and we would comment, too politely for the criticism to have great value; and yet that we read out our poems, and thought that they could be so tested, was a definition of our aims. *Love's Nocturne* is one of the most beautiful poems in the world, but no one can find out its beauty, so intricate its thought and metaphor, till he has read it over several times, or often stopped his reading to think out the meaning of some passage, and the *Faustine* of Swinburne, where many separate verses are powerful and musical, could not, were it read out, be understood with pleasure, however clearly it were read, because it has no more logical structure than a bag of shot. I shall, however, remember all my life that evening when Lionel Johnson read or spoke aloud in his musical monotone, where meaning and cadence found the most precise elocution,

his poem suggested “by the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross.” It was as though I listened to a great speech. Nor will that poem be to me again what it was that first night. For long I only knew Dowson’s *O Mors*, to quote but the first words of its long title, and his *Villanelle of Sunset* from his reading, and it was because of the desire to hold them in my hand that I suggested the first *Book of The Rhymers’ Club*. They were not speech but perfect song, though song for the speaking voice. It was perhaps our delight in poetry that was, before all else, speech or song, and could hold the attention of a fitting audience like a good play or good conversation, that made Francis Thompson, whom we admired so much — before the publication of his first poem I had brought to the Cheshire Cheese the proof sheets of his *Ode to the Setting Sun*, his first published poem — come but once and refuse to contribute to our book. Preoccupied with his elaborate verse, he may have seen only that which we renounced, and thought what seemed to us simplicity, mere emptiness. To some members this simplicity was perhaps created by their tumultuous lives, they praised a desired woman and hoped that she would find amid their praise her very self, or at worst, their very passion; and knew that she, ignoramus that she was, would have slept in the middle of *Love’s Nocturne*, lofty and tender though it be. Woman herself was still in our eyes, for all that, romantic and mysterious, still the priestess of her shrine, our emotions remembering the *Lilith* and the *Sybilla Palmifera* of Rossetti; for as yet that sense of comedy, which was soon to mould the very fashion plates, and, in the eyes of men of my generation, to destroy at last the sense of beauty itself, had scarce begun to show here and there, in slight subordinate touches among the designs of great painters and craftsmen. It could not be otherwise, for Johnson’s favourite phrase, that life is ritual, expressed something that was in some

degree in all our thoughts, and how could life be ritual if woman had not her symbolical place?

If Rossetti was a sub-conscious influence, and perhaps the most powerful of all, we looked consciously to Pater for our philosophy. Three or four years ago I re-read *Marius the Epicurean*, expecting to find I cared for it no longer, but it still seemed to me, as I think it seemed to us all, the only great prose in modern English, and yet I began to wonder if it, or the attitude of mind of which it was the noblest expression, had not caused the disaster of my friends. It taught us to walk upon a rope, tightly stretched through serene air, and we were left to keep our feet upon a swaying rope in a storm. Pater had made us learned; and, whatever we might be elsewhere, ceremonious and polite, and distant in our relations to one another, and I think none knew as yet that Dowson, who seemed to drink so little and had so much dignity and reserve, was breaking his heart for the daughter of the keeper of an Italian eating house, in dissipation and drink; and that he might that very night sleep upon a sixpenny bed in a doss house. It seems to me that even yet, and I am speaking of 1894 and 1895, we knew nothing of one another, but the poems that we read and criticised; perhaps I have forgotten or was too much in Ireland for knowledge, but of this I am certain, we shared nothing but the artistic life. Sometimes Johnson and Symons would visit our sage at Oxford, and I remember Johnson, whose reports however were not always to be trusted, returning with a sentence that long ran in my head. He had noticed books on political economy among Pater's books, and Pater had said, "Everything that has occupied man, for any length of time, is worthy of our study." Perhaps it was because of Pater's influence that we, with an affectation of learning, claimed the whole past of literature for our authority, instead of finding it like the young men in the age of comedy that followed us, in some new, and so still unrefuted authority; that we preferred

what seemed still uncrumbled rock, to the still unspotted foam; that we were traditional alike in our dress, in our manner, in our opinions, and in our style.

Why should men, who spoke their opinions in low voices, as though they feared to disturb the readers in some ancient library, and timidly as though they knew that all subjects had long since been explored, all questions long since decided in books whereon the dust settled — live lives of such disorder and seek to rediscover in verse the syntax of impulsive common life? Was it that we lived in what is called "an age of transition" and so lacked coherence, or did we but pursue antithesis?

VI

All things, apart from love and melancholy, were a study to us; Horne already learned in Botticelli had begun to boast that when he wrote of him there would be no literature, all would be but learning; Symons, as I wrote when I first met him, studied the music halls, as he might have studied the age of Chaucer; while I gave much time to what is called the Christian Cabala; nor was there any branch of knowledge Johnson did not claim for his own. When I had first gone to see him in 1888 or 1889, at the Charlotte Street house, I had called about five in the afternoon, but the man servant that he shared with Horne and Image, told me that he was not yet up, adding with effusion "he is always up for dinner at seven." This habit of breakfasting when others dined had been started by insomnia, but he came to defend it for its own sake. When I asked if it did not separate him from men and women he replied, "In my library I have all the knowledge of the world that I need." He had certainly a considerable library, far larger than that of any young man of my acquaintance, so large that he wondered if it

might not be possible to find some way of hanging new shelves from the ceiling like chandeliers. That room was always a pleasure to me, with its curtains of grey corduroy over door and window and book case, and its walls covered with brown paper, a fashion invented, I think, by Horne, that was soon to spread. There was a portrait of Cardinal Newman, looking a little like Johnson himself, some religious picture by Simeon Solomon, and works upon theology in Greek and Latin and a general air of neatness and severity; and talking there by candle light it never seemed very difficult to murmur Villiers de L'isle Adam's proud words, "As for living — our servants will do that for us." Yet I can now see that Johnson himself in some hidden, half-conscious part of him desired the world he had renounced, desired it as an object of study. I was often puzzled as to when and where he could have met the famous men or beautiful women, whose conversation, often wise, and always appropriate, he quoted so often, and it was not till a little before his death that I discovered that these conversations were imaginary. He never altered a detail of speech, and would quote what he had invented for Gladstone or Newman for years without amplification or amendment, with what seemed a scholar's accuracy. His favourite quotations were from Newman, whom, I believe, he had never met, though I can remember nothing now but Newman's greeting to Johnson, "I have always considered the profession of a man of letters a third order of the priesthood!" and these quotations became so well known that at Newman's death, the editor of *The Nineteenth Century* asked them for publication. Because of his delight in all that was formal and arranged he objected to the public quotation of private conversation even after death, and this scruple helped his refusal. Perhaps this dreaming was made a necessity by his artificial life, yet before that life began he wrote from Oxford to his Tory but flattered family, that as he stood mounted upon a library ladder in his

rooms taking a book from a shelf, Gladstone, about to pass the open door on his way upstairs to some college authority, had stopped, hesitated, come into the room and there spent an hour of talk. Presently it was discovered that Gladstone had not been near Oxford on the date given; yet he quoted that conversation without variation of a word until the end of his life, and I think believed in it as firmly as did his friends. These conversations were always admirable in their drama, but never too dramatic or even too polished to lose their casual accidental character; they were the phantasmagoria through which his philosophy of life found its expression. If he made his knowledge of the world out of his phantasy, his knowledge of tongues and books was certainly very great; and yet was that knowledge as great as he would have us believe? Did he really know Welsh, for instance, had he really as he told me, made his only love song, his incomparable *Morfydd* out of three lines in Welsh, heard sung by a woman at her door on a walking tour in Wales, or did he but wish to hide that he shared in their emotion?

“O, what are the winds?
And what are the waters?
Mine are your eyes.”

He wanted us to believe that all things, his poetry with its Latin weight, his religion with its constant reference to the Fathers of the Church, or to the philosophers of the Church, almost his very courtesy were a study and achievement of the intellect. Arthur Symons’ poetry made him angry, because it would substitute for that achievement, Parisian impressionism, “a London fog, the blurred tawny lamplight, the red omnibus, the dreary rain, the depressing mud, the glaring gin shop, the slatternly shivering women, three dexterous stanzas telling you that and nothing more.” I, on the other

hand, angered him by talking as if art existed for emotion only, and for refutation he would quote the close of the Aeschylean Trilogy, the trial of Orestes on the Acropolis. Yet at moments the thought came to him that intellect, as he conceived it, was too much a thing of many books, that it lacked lively experience. “Yeats,” he has said to me, “You need ten years in a library, but I have need of ten years in the wilderness.” When he said “Wilderness” I am certain, however, that he thought of some historical, some bookish desert, the Thebaid, or the lands about the Mareotic sea. His best poetry is natural and impassioned, but he spoke little of it, but much about his prose, and would contend that I had no right to consider words made to read, less natural than words made to be spoken; and he delighted in a sentence in his book on Thomas Hardy, that kept its vitality, as he contended, though two pages long. He punctuated after the manner of the seventeenth century and was always ready to spend an hour discussing the exact use of the colon. “One should use a colon where other people use a semi-colon, a semi-colon where other people use a comma,” was, I think, but a condescension to my ignorance for the matter was plainly beset with many subtleties.

VII

Not till some time in 1895 did I think he could ever drink too much for his sobriety — though what he drank would certainly be too much for that of most of the men whom I knew — I no more doubted his self-control, though we were very intimate friends, than I doubted his memories of Cardinal Newman. The discovery that he did was a great shock to me, and, I think, altered my general view of the world. I had, by my friendship with O’Leary, by my fight against Gavan Duffy, drawn the attention of a group

of men, who at that time controlled what remained of the old Fenian movement in England and Scotland; and at a moment when an attempt, that came to nothing, was being made to combine once more our constitutional and unconstitutional politics, I had been asked to represent them at some convention in the United States. I went to consult Johnson, whom I found sitting at a table with books about him. I was greatly tempted, because I was promised complete freedom of speech; and I was at the time enraged by some wild articles published by some Irish American newspaper, suggesting the burning down of the houses of Irish landlords. Nine years later I was lecturing in America, and a charming old Irishman came to see me with an interview to write, and we spent, and as I think in entire neglect of his interview, one of the happiest hours I have ever spent, comparing our tales of the Irish fairies, in which he very firmly believed. When he had gone I looked at his card, to discover that he was the writer of that criminal incitement. I told Johnson that if I had a week to decide in I would probably decide to go, but as they had only given me three days, I had refused. He would not hear of my refusal with so much awaiting my condemnation; and that condemnation would be effective with Catholics, for he would find me passages in the Fathers, condemning every kind of political crime, that of the dynamiter and the incendiary especially. I asked how could the Fathers have condemned weapons they had never heard of, but those weapons, he contended, were merely developments of old methods and weapons; they had decided all in principle; but I need not trouble myself about the matter, for he would put into my hands before I sailed the typewritten statement of their doctrine, dealing with the present situation in the utmost detail. He seemed perfectly logical, but a little more confident and impassioned than usual, and I had, I think, promised to accept — when he rose from his chair, took a step towards me in his eagerness, and fell on to the floor; and I

saw that he was drunk. From that on, he began to lose control of his life; he shifted from Charlotte Street, where, I think, there was fear that he would overset lamp or candle and burn the house, to Gray's Inn, and from Gray's Inn to old rambling rooms in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and at last one called to find his outer door shut, the milk on the doorstep sour. Sometimes I would urge him to put himself, as Jack Nettleship had done, into an Institute. One day when I had been very urgent, he spoke of "a craving that made every atom of his body cry out" and said the moment after, "I do not want to be cured," and a moment after that, "In ten years I shall be penniless and shabby, and borrow half-crowns from friends." He seemed to contemplate a vision that gave him pleasure, and now that I look back, I remember that he once said to me that Wilde got, perhaps, an increase of pleasure and excitement from the degradation of that group of beggars and blackmailers where he sought his pathics, and I remember, too, his smile at my surprise, as though he spoke of psychological depths I could never enter. Did the austerity, the melancholy of his thoughts, that spiritual ecstasy which he touched at times, heighten, as complementary colours heighten one another, not only the Vision of Evil, but its fascination? Was it only Villon, or did Dante also feel the fascination of evil, when shown in its horror, and, as it were, judged and lost; and what proud man does not feel temptation strengthened from the certainty that his intellect is not deceived?

VIII

I began now to hear stories of Dowson, whom I knew only at the Rhymers, or through some chance meeting at Johnson's. I was indolent and procrastinating, and when I thought of asking him to dine, or taking some other step towards better knowledge, he seemed to be in Paris, or at Dieppe.

He was drinking, but, unlike Johnson, who, at the autopsy after his death, was discovered never to have grown, except in the brain, after his fifteenth year, he was full of sexual desire. Johnson and he were close friends, and Johnson lectured him out of the Fathers upon chastity, and boasted of the great good done him thereby. But the rest of us counted the glasses emptied in their talk. I began to hear now in some detail of the restaurant-keeper's daughter, and of her marriage to the waiter, and of that weekly game of cards with her that filled so great a share of Dowson's emotional life. Sober, he would look at no other woman, it was said, but, drunk, would desire whatever woman chance brought, clean or dirty.

Johnson was stern by nature, strong by intellect, and always, I think, deliberately picked his company, but Dowson seemed gentle, affectionate, drifting. His poetry shows how sincerely he felt the fascination of religion, but his religion had certainly no dogmatic outline, being but a desire for a condition of virginal ecstasy. If it is true, as Arthur Symons, his very close friend, has written, that he loved the restaurant-keeper's daughter for her youth, one may be almost certain that he sought from religion some similar quality, something of that which the angels find who move perpetually, as Swedenborg has said, towards "the dayspring of their youth." Johnson's poetry, like Johnson himself before his last decay, conveys an emotion of joy, of intellectual clearness, of hard energy; he gave us of his triumph; while Dowson's poetry is sad, as he himself seemed, and pictures his life of temptation and defeat,

"Unto us they belong
Us the bitter and gay,
Wine and women and song."

Their way of looking at their intoxication showed their characters. Johnson, who could not have written *Dark Angel* if he did not suffer from remorse, showed to his friends an impenitent face, and defeated me when I tried to prevent the foundation of an Irish convivial club — it was brought to an end after one meeting by the indignation of the members' wives — whereas the last time I saw Dowson he was pouring out a glass of whiskey for himself in an empty corner of my room and murmuring over and over in what seemed automatic apology "The first to-day."

IX

Two men are always at my side, Lionel Johnson and John Synge whom I was to meet a little later; but Johnson is to me the more vivid in memory, possibly because of the external finish, the clearly-marked lineaments of his body, which seemed but to express the clarity of his mind. I think Dowson's best verse immortal, bound, that is, to outlive famous novels and plays and learned histories and other discursive things, but he was too vague and gentle for my affections. I understood him too well, for I had been like him but for the appetite that made me search out strong condiments. Though I cannot explain what brought others of my generation to such misfortune, I think that (falling backward upon my parable of the moon) I can explain some part of Dowson's and Johnson's dissipation —

"What portion in the world can the artist have,
Who has awaked from the common dream,
But dissipation and despair?"

When Edmund Spencer described the islands of Phaedria and of Acrasia he aroused the indignation of Lord Burleigh, "that rugged forehead" and

Lord Burleigh was in the right if morality were our only object.

In those islands certain qualities of beauty, certain forms of sensuous loveliness were separated from all the general purposes of life, as they had not been hitherto in European literature — and would not be again, for even the historical process has its ebb and flow, till Keats wrote his *Endymion*. I think that the movement of our thought has more and more so separated certain images and regions of the mind, and that these images grow in beauty as they grow in sterility. Shakespeare leaned, as it were, even as craftsman, upon the general fate of men and nations, had about him the excitement of the playhouse; and all poets, including Spencer in all but a few pages, until our age came, and when it came almost all, have had some propaganda or traditional doctrine to give companionship with their fellows. Had not Matthew Arnold his faith in what he described as the best thought of his generation? Browning his psychological curiosity, Tennyson, as before him Shelley and Wordsworth, moral values that were not aesthetic values? But Coleridge of the *Ancient Mariner*, and *Kubla Khan*, and Rossetti in all his writings made what Arnold has called that "morbid effort," that search for "perfection of thought and feeling, and to unite this to perfection of form," sought this new, pure beauty, and suffered in their lives because of it. The typical men of the classical age (I think of Commodus, with his half-animal beauty, his cruelty, and his caprice), lived public lives, pursuing curiosities of appetite, and so found in Christianity, with its Thebaid and its Mariotic Sea the needed curb. But what can the Christian confessor say to those who more and more must make all out of the privacy of their thought, calling up perpetual images of desire, for he cannot say "Cease to be artist, cease to be poet," where the whole life is art and poetry, nor can he bid men leave the world, who suffer from the terrors that pass before shut-eyes. Coleridge, and Rossetti though his dull brother

did once persuade him that he was an agnostic, were devout Christians, and Steinbock and Beardsley were so towards their lives' end, and Dowson and Johnson always, and yet I think it but deepened despair and multiplied temptation.

"Dark Angel, with thine aching lust,
To rid the world of penitence:
Malicious angel, who still dost
My soul such subtil violence!

When music sounds, then changest thou
A silvery to a sultry fire:
Nor will thine envious heart allow
Delight untortured by desire.

Through thee, the gracious Muses turn
To Furies, O mine Enemy!
And all the things of beauty burn
With flames of evil ecstasy.

Because of thee, the land of dreams
Becomes a gathering place of fears:
Until tormented slumber seems
One vehemence of useless tears."

Why are these strange souls born everywhere to-day? with hearts that Christianity, as shaped by history, cannot satisfy. Our love letters wear out our love; no school of painting outlasts its founders, every stroke of the brush exhausts the impulse, Pre-Raphaelitism had some twenty years;

impressionism thirty perhaps. Why should we believe that religion can never bring round its antithesis? Is it true that our air is disturbed, as Malarmé said, by "the trembling of the veil of the temple," or "that our whole age is seeking to bring forth a sacred book?" Some of us thought that book near towards the end of last century, but the tide sank again.

X

I do not know whether John Davidson, whose life also was tragic, made that "morbid effort," that search for "perfection of thought and feeling," for he is hidden behind failure, to unite it "to perfection of form." At eleven one morning I met him in the British Museum reading room, probably in 1894, when I was in London for the production of *The Land of Heart's Desire*, but certainly after some long absence from London. "Are you working here?" I said; "No," he said, "I am loafing, for I have finished my day's work." "What, already?" "I work an hour a day — I cannot work longer without exhaustion, and even as it is, if I meet anybody and get into talk, I cannot write the next day; that is why I loaf when my work is finished." No one had ever doubted his industry; he had supported his wife and family for years by "devilling" many hours a day for some popular novelist. "What work is it?" I said. "I am writing verse," he answered. "I had been writing prose for a long time, and then one day I thought I might just as well write what I liked, as I must starve in any case. It was the luckiest thought I ever had, for my agent now gets me forty pounds for a ballad, and I made three hundred out of my last book of verse."

He was older by ten years than his fellow Rhymers; a national schoolmaster from Scotland, he had been dismissed, he told us, for asking for a rise in his salary, and had come to London with his wife and children.

He looked older than his years. “Ellis,” he had said, “how old are you?” “Fifty,” Edwin Ellis replied, or whatever his age was. “Then I will take off my wig. I never take off my wig when there is a man under thirty in the room.” He had endured and was to endure again, a life of tragic penury, which was made much harder by the conviction that the world was against him, that he was refused for some reason his rightful position. Ellis thought that he pined even for social success, and I that his Scots jealousy kept him provincial and but half articulate.

During the quarrel over Parnell’s grave a quotation from Goethe ran through the papers, describing our Irish jealousy: “The Irish seem to me like a pack of hounds, always dragging down some noble stag.” But I do not think we object to distinction for its own sake; if we kill the stag, it is that we may carry off his head and antlers. “The Irish people,” O’Leary used to say, “do not know good from bad in any art, but they do not hate the good once it is pointed out to them because it is good.” An infallible Church, with its Mass in Latin, and its mediaeval philosophy, and our Protestant social prejudice, have kept our ablest men from levelling passions; but Davidson with a jealousy, which may be Scottish, seeing that Carlyle had it, was quick to discover sour grapes. He saw in delicate, laborious, discriminating taste, an effeminate pedantry, and would, when that mood was on him, delight in all that seemed healthy, popular, and bustling. Once when I had praised Herbert Horne for his knowledge and his taste, he burst out, “If a man must be a connoisseur, let him be a connoisseur in women.” He, indeed, was accustomed, in the most characteristic phrase of his type, to describe the Rhymers as lacking in “blood and guts,” and very nearly brought us to an end by attempting to supply the deficiency by the addition of four Scotsmen. He brought all four upon the same evening, and one read out a poem upon the Life Boat, evidently intended for a recitation; another

described how, when gold-digging in Australia, he had fought and knocked down another miner for doubting the rotundity of the earth; while of the remainder I can remember nothing except that they excelled in argument. He insisted upon their immediate election, and the Rhymers, through that complacency of good manners whereby educated Englishmen so often surprise me, obeyed, though secretly resolved never to meet again; and it cost me seven hours' work to get another meeting, and vote the Scotsmen out. A few days later I chanced upon Davidson at some restaurant; he was full of amiability, and when we parted shook my hand, and proclaimed enthusiastically that I had "blood and guts." I think he might have grown to be a successful man had he been enthusiastic instead about Dowson or Johnson, or Horne or Symons, for they had what I still lacked, conscious deliberate craft, and what I must lack always, scholarship. They had taught me that violent energy, which is like a fire of straw, consumes in a few minutes the nervous vitality, and is useless in the arts. Our fire must burn slowly, and we must constantly turn away to think, constantly analyse what we have done, be content even to have little life outside our work, to show, perhaps, to other men, as little as the watch-mender shows, his magnifying glass caught in his screwed-up eye. Only then do we learn to conserve our vitality, to keep our mind enough under control and to make our technique sufficiently flexible for expression of the emotions of life as they arise. A few months after our meeting in the Museum, Davidson had spent his inspiration. "The fires are out," he said, "and I must hammer the cold iron." When I heard a few years ago that he had drowned himself, I knew that I had always expected some such end. With enough passion to make a great poet, through meeting no man of culture in early life, he lacked intellectual receptivity, and, anarchic and indefinite, lacked pose and gesture, and now no verse of his clings to my memory.

XI

Gradually Arthur Symons came to replace in my intimate friendship, Lionel Johnson from whom I was slowly separated by a scruple of conscience. If he came to see me he sat tongue-tied unless I gave him the drink that seemed necessary to bring his vitality to but its normal pitch, and if I called upon him he drank so much that I became his confederate. Once, when a friend and I had sat long after our proper bed-time at his constantly repeated and most earnest entreaty, knowing what black melancholy would descend upon him at our departure, and with the unexpressed hope of getting him to his bed, he fixed upon us a laughing and whimsical look, and said: — "I want you two men to understand that you are merely two men that I am drinking with." That was the only time that I was to hear from him an imaginary conversation that had not an air of the most scrupulous accuracy. He gave two accounts of a conversation with Wilde in prison; in one Wilde wore his hair long, and in the other it had been cropped by the prison barber. He was gradually losing, too, the faculty of experience, and in his prose and verse repeated the old ideas and emotions, but faintly, as though with fading interest. I am certain that he prayed much, and on those rare days that I came upon him dressed and active before midday or but little after, I concluded that he had been to morning Mass at Farm Street.

When with Johnson I had tuned myself to his mood, but Arthur Symons, more than any man I have ever known, could slip as it were into the mind of another, and my thoughts gained in richness and in clearness from his sympathy, nor shall I ever know how much my practice and my theory owe to the passages that he read me from Catullus and from Verlaine and Mallarmé. I had read *Axel* to myself or was still reading it, so slowly, and

with so much difficulty, that certain passages had an exaggerated importance, while all remained so obscure that I could without much effort imagine that here at last was the Sacred Book I longed for. An Irish friend of mine lives in a house where beside a little old tower rises a great new Gothic hall and stair, and I have sometimes got him to extinguish all light but a little Roman lamp, and in that faint light and among great vague shadows, blotting away the unmeaning ornament, have imagined myself partaking in some incredible romance. Half-a-dozen times, beginning in boyhood with Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, I have in that mood possessed for certain hours or months the book that I long for; and Symons, without ever being false to his own impressionist view of art and of life, deepened as I think my longing.

It seems to me, looking backward, that we always discussed life at its most intense moment, that moment which gives a common sacredness to the Song of Songs, and to the Sermon on the Mount, and in which one discovers something supernatural, a stirring as it were of the roots of the hair. He was making those translations from Mallarmé and from Verlaine, from Calderon, from St. John of the Cross, which are the most accomplished metrical translations of our time, and I think that those from Mallarmé may have given elaborate form to my verses of those years, to the latter poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds*, to *The Shadowy Waters*, while Villiers de L'Isle Adam had shaped whatever in my *Rosa Alchemica* Pater had not shaped. I can remember the day in Fountain Court when he first read me Herodiade's address to some Sibyl who is her nurse and it may be the moon also:

"The horror of my virginity
Delights me, and I would envelope me
In the terror of my tresses, that, by night,

Inviolate reptile, I might feel the white
And glimmering radiance of thy frozen fire,
Thou that art chaste and diest of desire,
White night of ice and of the cruel snow!
Eternal sister, my lone sister, lo
My dreams uplifted before thee! now, apart,
So rare a crystal is my dreaming heart,
And all about me lives but in mine own
Image, the idolatrous mirror of my pride,
Mirroring this Herodiade diamond-eyed."

Yet I am certain that there was something in myself compelling me to attempt creation of an art as separate from everything heterogenous and casual, from all character and circumstance, as some Herodiade of our theatre, dancing seemingly alone in her narrow moving luminous circle. Certainly I had gone a great distance from my first poems, from all that I had copied from the folk-art of Ireland, as from the statue of Mausolus and his Queen, where the luminous circle is motionless and contains the entire popular life; and yet why am I so certain? I can imagine an Aran Islander who had strayed into the Luxembourg Gallery, turning bewildered from Impressionist or Post-Impressionist, but lingering at Moreau's "Jason," to study in minute astonishment the elaborate background, where there are so many jewels, so much wrought stone and moulded bronze. Had not lover promised mistress in his own island song, "A ship with a gold and silver mast, gloves of the skin of a fish, and shoes of the skin of a bird, and a suit of the dearest silk in Ireland?"

XII

Hitherto when in London I had stayed with my family in Bedford Park, but now I was to live for some twelve months in chambers in the Temple that opened through a little passage into those of Arthur Symons. If anybody rang at either door, one or other would look through a window in the connecting passage, and report. We would then decide whether one or both should receive the visitor, whether his door or mine should be opened, or whether both doors were to remain closed. I have never liked London, but London seemed less disagreeable when one could walk in quiet, empty places after dark, and upon a Sunday morning sit upon the margin of a fountain almost as alone as if in the country. I was already settled there, I imagine, when a publisher called and proposed that Symons should edit a Review or Magazine, and Symons consented on the condition that Beardsley were Art Editor — and I was delighted at his condition, as I think were all his other proposed contributors. Aubrey Beardsley had been dismissed from the Art editorship of *The Yellow Book* under circumstances that had made us indignant. He had illustrated Wilde's *Salome*, his strange satiric art had raised the popular press to fury, and at the height of the excitement aroused by Wilde's condemnation, a popular novelist, a woman who had great influence among the most conventional part of the British public, had written demanding his dismissal. "She owed it to her position before the British people," she had said. Beardsley was not even a friend of Wilde's — they even disliked each other — he had no sexual abnormality, but he was certainly unpopular, and the moment had come to get rid of unpopular persons. The public at once concluded — they could hardly conclude otherwise, he was dismissed by telegram — that there was evidence against him, and Beardsley, who was some twenty-three years old, being embittered and miserable, plunged into dissipation. We knew that

we must face an infuriated press and public, but being all young we delighted in enemies and in everything that had an heroic air.

XIII

We might have survived but for our association with Beardsley, perhaps, but for his *Under the Hill*, a Rabelaisian fragment promising a literary genius as great maybe as his artistic genius, and for the refusal of the bookseller who controlled the railway bookstalls to display our wares. The bookseller's manager, no doubt looking for a design of Beardsley's, pitched upon Blake's *Anteus setting Virgil and Dante upon the verge of Cocytus* as the ground of refusal, and when Arthur Symons pointed out that Blake was considered "a very spiritual artist" replied, "O, Mr Symons, you must remember that we have an audience of young ladies as well as an audience of agnostics." However, he called Arthur Symons back from the door to say, "If contrary to our expectations *The Savoy* should have a large sale, we should be very glad to see you again." As Blake's design illustrated an article of mine, I wrote a letter upon that remarkable saying to a principal daily newspaper. But I had mentioned Beardsley, and I was told that the editor had made it a rule that his paper was never to mention Beardsley's name. I said upon meeting him later, "Would you have made the same rule in the case of Hogarth?" against whom much the same objection could be taken, and he replied with what seemed to me a dreamy look, as though suddenly reminded of a lost opportunity — "Ah, there was no popular press in Hogarth's day." We were not allowed to forget that in our own day there was a popular press, and its opinions began to affect our casual acquaintance, and even our comfort in public places. At some well-known house, an elderly man to whom I had just been introduced, got up from my

side and walked to the other end of the room; but it was as much my reputation as an Irish rebel as the evil company that I was supposed to keep, that excited some young men in a railway carriage to comment upon my general career in voices raised that they might catch my attention. I discovered, however, one evening that we were perhaps envied as well as despised. I was in the pit at some theatre, and had just noticed Arthur Symons a little in front of me, when I heard a young man, who looked like a shop-assistant or clerk, say, "There is Arthur Symons. If he can't get an order, why can't he pay for a stall." Clearly we were supposed to prosper upon iniquity, and to go to the pit added a sordid parsimony. At another theatre I caught sight of a woman that I once liked, the widow of some friend of my father's youth, and tried to attract her attention, but she had no eyes for anything but the stage curtain; and at some house where I met no hostility to myself, a popular novelist snatched out of my hand a copy of *The Savoy*, and opening it at Beardsley's drawing, called *The Barber*, began to expound its bad drawing and wound up with, "Now if you want to admire really great black and white art, admire the Punch Cartoons of Mr Lindley Sambourne," and our hostess, after making peace between us, said, "O, Mr Yeats, why do you not send your poems to *The Spectator* instead of to *The Savoy*." The answer, "My friends read the *Savoy* and they do not read *The Spectator*," brought a look of deeper disapproval.

Yet, even apart from Beardsley, we were a sufficiently distinguished body: Max Beerbohm, Bernard Shaw, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, Charles Conder, Charles Shannon, Havelock Ellis, Selwyn Image, Joseph Conrad; but nothing counted but the one hated name. I think that had we been challenged we might have argued something after this fashion: — "Science through much ridicule and some persecution has won its right to explore whatever passes before its corporeal eye, and merely

because it passes: to set as it were upon an equality the beetle and the whale though Ben Jonson could find no justification for the entomologist in *The New Inn*, but that he had been crossed in love. Literature now demands the same right of exploration of all that passes before the mind's eyes, and merely because it passes." Not a complete defence, for it substitutes a spiritual for a physical objective, but sufficient it may be for the moment, and to settle our place in the historical process.

The critic might well reply that certain of my generation delighted in writing with an unscientific partiality for subjects long forbidden. Yet is it not most important to explore especially what has been long forbidden, and to do this not only "with the highest moral purpose," like the followers of Ibsen, but gaily, out of sheer mischief, or sheer delight in that play of the mind. Donne could be as metaphysical as he pleased, and yet never seemed unhuman and hysterical as Shelley often does, because he could be as physical as he pleased; and besides who will thirst for the metaphysical, who have a parched tongue, if we cannot recover the Vision of Evil?

I have felt in certain early works of my own which I have long abandoned, and here and there in the work of others of my generation, a slight, sentimental sensuality which is disagreeable, and doesn't exist in the work of Donne, let us say, because he, being permitted to say what he pleased, was never tempted to linger, or rather to pretend that we can linger, between spirit and sense. How often had I heard men of my time talk of the meeting of spirit and sense, yet there is no meeting but only change upon the instant, and it is by the perception of a change like the sudden "blacking out" of the lights of the stage, that passion creates its most violent sensation.

XIV

Dowson was now at Dieppe, now at a Normandy village. Wilde, too, was at Dieppe; and Symons, Beardsley, and others would cross and recross, returning with many tales, and there were letters and telegrams. Dowson wrote a protest against some friend's too vivid essay upon the disorder of his life, and explained that in reality he was living a life of industry in a little country village; but before the letter arrived that friend received a wire, "arrested, sell watch and send proceeds." Dowson's watch had been left in London — and then another wire, "Am free." Dowson, ran the tale as I heard it ten years after, had got drunk and fought the baker, and a deputation of villagers had gone to the magistrate and pointed out that Monsieur Dowson was one of the most illustrious of English poets. "Quite right to remind me," said the magistrate, "I will imprison the baker."

A Rhymer had seen Dowson at some cafe in Dieppe with a particularly common harlot, and as he passed, Dowson, who was half drunk, caught him by the sleeve and whispered, "She writes poetry — it is like Browning and Mrs Browning." Then there came a wonderful tale, repeated by Dowson himself, whether by word of mouth or by letter I do not remember. Wilde has arrived in Dieppe, and Dowson presses upon him the necessity of acquiring "a more wholesome taste." They empty their pockets on to the café table, and though there is not much, there is enough if both heaps are put into one. Meanwhile the news has spread, and they set out accompanied by a cheering crowd. Arrived at their destination, Dowson and the crowd remain outside, and presently Wilde returns. He says in a low voice to Dowson, "The first these ten years, and it will be the last. It was like cold mutton" — always, as Henley had said, "a scholar and a gentleman," he no doubt remembered the sense in which the Elizabethan dramatists used the words "Cold mutton" — and then aloud so that the crowd may hear him, "But tell it in England, for it will entirely restore my character."

XV

When the first few numbers of *The Savoy* had been published, the contributors and the publisher gave themselves a supper, and Symons explained that certain among us were invited afterwards to the publisher's house, and if I went there that once I need never go again. I considered the publisher a scandalous person, and had refused to meet him; we were all agreed as to his character, and only differed as to the distance that should lie between him and us. I had just received two letters, one from T. W. Rolleston protesting with all the conventional moral earnestness of an article in *The Spectator* newspaper, against my writing for such a magazine; and one from A. E. denouncing that magazine, which he called the "Organ of the Incubi and the Succubi," with the intensity of a personal conviction. I had forgotten that Arthur Symons had borrowed the letters until as we stood about the supper table waiting for the signal to be seated, I heard the infuriated voice of the publisher shouting, "Give me the letter, give me the letter, I will prosecute that man," and I saw Symons waving Rolleston's letter just out of reach. Then Symons folded it up and put it in his pocket, and began to read out A. E. and the publisher was silent, and I saw Beardsley listening. Presently Beardsley came to me and said, "Yeats, I am going to surprise you very much. I think your friend is right. All my life I have been fascinated by the spiritual life — when a child I saw a vision of a Bleeding Christ over the mantelpiece — but after all to do one's work when there are other things one wants to do so much more, is a kind of religion."

Something, I forget what, delayed me a few minutes after the supper was over, and when I arrived at our publisher's I found Beardsley propped up on

a chair in the middle of the room, grey and exhausted, and as I came in he left the chair and went into another room to spit blood, but returned immediately. Our publisher, perspiration pouring from his face, was turning the handle of a hurdy gurdy piano — it worked by electricity, I was told, when the company did not cut off the supply — and very plainly had had enough of it, but Beardsley pressed him to labour on, "The tone is so beautiful," "It gives me such deep pleasure," etc., etc. It was his method of keeping our publisher at a distance.

Another image competes with that image in my memory. Beardsley has arrived at Fountain Court a little after breakfast with a young woman who belongs to our publisher's circle and certainly not to ours, and is called "twopence coloured," or is it "penny plain." He is a little drunk and his mind has been running upon his dismissal from *The Yellow Book*, for he puts his hand upon the wall and stares into a mirror. He mutters, "Yes, yes. I look like a Sodomite," which he certainly did not. "But no, I am not that," and then begins railing, against his ancestors, accusing them of that and this, back to and including the great Pitt, from whom he declares himself descended.

XVI

I can no more justify my convictions in these brief chapters, where I touch on fundamental things, than Shakespeare could justify within the limits of a sonnet, his conviction that the soul of the wide world dreams of things to come; and yet as I have set out to describe nature as I see it, I must not only describe events but those patterns into which they fall, when I am the looker-on. A French miracle-working priest once said to Maud Gonne and myself and to an English Catholic who had come with us, that a certain

holy woman had been the “victim” for his village, and that another holy woman who had been “victim” for all France, had given him her Crucifix, because he, too, was doomed to become a “victim.”

French psychical research has offered evidence to support the historical proofs that such saints as Lydwine of Schiedam, whose life suggested to Paul Claudel his *L’Annonce faite à Marie*, did really cure disease by taking it upon themselves. As disease was considered the consequence of sin, to take it upon themselves was to copy Christ. All my proof that mind flows into mind, and that we cannot separate mind and body, drives me to accept the thought of victimage in many complex forms, and I ask myself if I cannot so explain the strange, precocious genius of Beardsley. He was in my Lunar metaphor a man of the thirteenth Phase, his nature on the edge of Unity of Being, the understanding of that Unity by the intellect his one overmastering purpose; whereas Lydwine de Schiedam and her like, being of the saints, are at the seven and twentieth Phase, and seek a unity with a life beyond individual being; and so being all subjective he would take upon himself not the consequences, but the knowledge of sin. I surrender myself to the wild thought that by so doing he enabled persons who had never heard his name, to recover innocence. I have so often, too, practised meditations, or experienced dreams, where the meditations or dreams of two or three persons contrast and complement one another, in so far as those persons are in themselves complementary or contrasting, that I am convinced that it is precisely from the saint or potential saint that he would gather this knowledge. I see in his fat women and shadowy, pathetic girls, his horrible children, half child, half embryo, in all the lascivious monstrous imagery of the privately published designs, the phantasms that from the beginning have defied the scourge and the hair shirt. I once said to him half seriously, “Beardsley, I was defending you last night in the only way in

which it is possible to defend you, by saying that all you draw is inspired by rage against iniquity," and he answered, "If it were so inspired the work would be in no way different," meaning, as I think, that he drew with such sincerity that no change of motive could change the image.

I know that some turn of disease had begun to parade erotic images before his eyes, and I do not doubt that he drew these images. "I make a blot upon the paper," he said to me; "And I begin to shove the ink about and something comes." But I was wrong to say that he drew these things in rage against iniquity, for to know that rage he must needs be objective, concerned with other people, with the Church or the Divinity, with something outside his own head, and responsible not for the knowledge but for the consequence of sin. His preparation had been the exhaustion of sin in act, while the preparation of the Saint is the exhaustion of his pride, and instead of the Saint's humility, he had come to see the images of the mind in a kind of frozen passion, the virginity of the intellect.

Does not all art come when a nature, that never ceases to judge itself, exhausts personal emotion in action or desire so completely that something impersonal, something that has nothing to do with action or desire, suddenly starts into its place, something which is as unforeseen, as completely organized, even as unique, as the images that pass before the mind between sleeping and waking.

But all art is not victimage; and much of the hatred of the art of Beardsley came from the fact that victimage, though familiar under another name to French criticism since the time of Baudelaire, was not known in England. He pictures almost always disillusion, and apart from those privately published drawings which he tried upon his deathbed to have destroyed, there is no representation of desire. Even the beautiful women are exaggerated into doll-like prettiness by a spirit of irony, or are poignant

with a thwarted or corrupted innocence. I see his art with more understanding now, than when he lived, for in 1895 or 1896, I was in despair at the new breath of comedy that had begun to wither the beauty that I loved, just when that beauty seemed about to unite itself to mystery. I said to him once, "You have never done anything to equal your Salome with the head of John the Baptist." I think, that for the moment he was sincere when he replied, "Yes, yes; but beauty is so difficult." It was for the moment only, for as the popular rage increased and his own disease increased, he became more and more violent in his satire, or created out of a spirit of mockery a form of beauty where his powerful logical intellect eliminated every outline that suggested meditation or even satisfied passion.

The distinction between the Image, between the apparition as it were, and the personal action and desire, took a new form at the approach of death. He made two or three charming and blasphemous designs; I think especially of a Madonna and Child, where the Child has a foolish, doll-like face, and an elaborate modern baby's dress; and of a St. Rose of Lima in an expensive gown decorated with roses, ascending to Heaven upon the bosom of the Madonna, her face enraptured with love, but with that form of it which is least associated with sanctity. I think that his conversion to Catholicism was sincere, but that so much of impulse as could exhaust itself in prayer and ceremony, in formal action and desire, found itself mocked by the antithetical image; and yet I am perhaps mistaken, perhaps it was merely his recognition that historical Christianity had dwindled to a box of toys, and that it might be amusing to empty the whole box on to the counterpane.

XVII

I had been a good deal in Paris, though never very long at any time, my later visits with a member of the Rhymer's Club whose curiosity or emotion was roused by every pretty girl. He treated me with a now admiring, now mocking wonder, because being in love, and in no way lucky in that love, I had grown exceedingly puritanical so far as my immediate neighbourhood was concerned. One night, close to the Luxembourg, a strange young woman in bicycling costume, came out of a side street, threw one arm about his neck, walked beside us in perfect silence for a hundred yards or so, and then darted up another side street. He had a red and white complexion and fair hair, but how she discovered that in the dark I could not understand. I became angry and reproachful, but he defended himself by saying, "You never meet a stray cat without caressing it: I have similar instincts." Presently we found ourselves at some Café — the Café D'Harcourt, I think — and when I looked up from my English newspaper, I found myself surrounded with painted ladies and saw that he was taking vengeance. I could not have carried on a conversation in French, but I was able to say, "That gentleman over there has never refused wine or coffee to any lady," and in a little they had all settled about him like greedy pigeons.

I had put my ideal of those years, an ideal that passed away with youth, into my description of *Proud Costello*. "He was of those ascetics of passion, who keep their hearts pure for love or for hatred, as other men for God, for Mary and for the Saints." My friend was not interested in passion. A woman drew him to her by some romantic singularity in her beauty or her circumstance, and drew him the more if the curiosity she aroused were half intellectual. A little after the time I write of, throwing himself into my chair after some visit to a music-hall or hippodrome, he began, "O, Yeats, I was never in love with a serpent-charmer before." He was objective. For him

“the visible world existed” as he was fond of quoting, and I suspect him of a Moon that had entered its fourth quarter.

XVIII

At first I used to stay with Macgregor Mathers and his gracious young wife near the Champ de Mars, or in the Rue Mozart, but later by myself in a student’s hotel in the Latin quarter, and I cannot remember always where I stayed when this or that event took place. Macgregor Mathers, or Macgregor, for he had now shed the “Mathers,” would come down to breakfast one day with his Horace, the next day with his Macpherson’s Ossian, and read out fragments during breakfast, considering both books of equal authenticity. Once when I questioned that of Ossian, he got into a rage — what right had I to take sides with the English enemy — and I found that for him the eighteenth century controversy still raged. At night he would dress himself in Highland dress, and dance the sword dance, and his mind brooded upon the ramifications of clans and tartans. Yet I have at moments doubted whether he had seen the Highlands, or even, until invited there by some White Rose Society, Scotland itself. Every Sunday he gave to the evocation of Spirits, and I noted that upon that day he would spit blood. That did not matter, he said, because it came from his head, not his lungs; what ailed him I do not know, but I think that he lived under some great strain, and presently I noted that he was drinking neat brandy, not to drunkenness, but to detriment of mind and body.

He began to foresee changes in the world, announcing in 1893 or 1894, the imminence of immense wars, and was it in 1895 or 1896 that he learned ambulance work, and made others learn it? He had a sabre wound on his wrist — or perhaps his forehead, for my memory is not clear — got in

some student riot that he had mistaken for the beginning of war. It may have been some talk of his that made me write the poem that begins:

"The dews drop slowly and dreams gather;
unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears."

War was to bring, or be brought by, anarchy, but that would be a passing stage, he declared, for his dreams were all Napoleonic. He certainly foresaw some great role that he could play, had made himself an acknowledged master of the war-game, and for a time taught it to French officers for his living. He was to die of melancholia, and was perhaps already mad at certain moments or upon certain topics, though he did not make upon me that impression in those early days, being generous, gay, and affable. I have seen none that lacked philosophy and trod *Hodos Camelionis* come to good there; and he lacked it but for a vague affirmation, that he would have his friends affirm also, each for himself, "There is no part of me that is not of the Gods." Once, when he had told me that he met his Teachers in some great crowd, and only knew that they were phantoms by a shock that was like an electric shock to his heart, I asked him how he knew that he was not deceived or hallucinated. He said, "I had been visited by one of them the other night, and I followed him out, and followed him down that little lane to the right. Presently I fell over the milk boy, and the milk boy got in a rage because he said that not only I but the man in front had fallen over him." He like all that I have known, who have given themselves up to images, and to the murmuring of images, thought that when he had proved that an image could act independently of his mind, he had proved also that neither it, nor

what it had murmured, had originated there. Yet had I need of proof to the contrary, I had it while under his roof. I was eager for news of the Spanish-American war, and went to the Rue Mozart before breakfast to buy a *New York Herald*. As I went out past the young Normandy servant who was laying breakfast, I was telling myself some schoolboy romance, and had just reached a place where I carried my arm in a sling after some remarkable escape. I bought my paper and returned, to find Macgregor on the doorstep. "Why, you are all right," he said, "What did the Bonne mean by telling me that you had hurt your arm and carried it in a sling."

Once when I met him in the street in his Highland clothes, with several knives in his stocking, he said, "When I am dressed like this I feel like a walking flame," and I think that everything he did was but an attempt to feel like a walking flame. Yet at heart he was, I think, gentle, and perhaps even a little timid. He had some impediment in his nose that gave him a great deal of trouble, and it could have been removed had he not shrunk from the slight operation; and once when he was left in a mouse-infested flat with some live traps, he collected his captives into a large birdcage, and to avoid the necessity of their drowning, fed them there for weeks. Being a self-educated, un-scholarly, though learned man, he was bound to express the fundamental antithesis in the most crude form, and being arrogant, to prevent as far as possible that alternation between the two natures which is, it may be, necessary to sanity. When the nature turns to its spiritual opposite alone there can be no alternation, but what nature is pure enough for that.

I see Paris in the Eighteen-nineties as a number of events separated from one another, and without cause or consequence, without lot or part in the logical structure of my life; I can often as little find their dates as I can those of events in my early childhood. William Sharp, who came to see me there, may have come in 1895, or on some visit four or five years later, but

certainly I was in an hotel in the Boulevard Raspail. When he stood up to go he said, “What is that?” pointing to a geometrical form painted upon a little piece of cardboard that lay upon my window sill. And then before I could answer, looked out of the window saying, “There is a funeral passing.” I said, “That is curious, as the Death symbol is painted upon the card.” I did not look, but I am sure there was no funeral. A few days later he came back and said, “I have been very ill; you must never allow me to see that symbol again.” He did not seem anxious to be questioned, but years later he said, “I will now tell you what happened in Paris. I had two rooms at my hotel, a front sitting-room and a bedroom leading out of it. As I passed the threshold of the sitting-room, I saw a woman standing at the bureau writing, and presently she went into my bedroom. I thought somebody had got into the wrong room by mistake, but when I went to the bureau I saw the sheet of paper she had seemed to write upon, and there was no writing upon it. I went into my bed-room and I found nobody, but as there was a door from the bedroom on to the stairs I went down the stairs to see if she had gone that way. When I got out into the street I saw her just turning a corner, but when I turned the corner there was nobody there, and then I saw her at another corner. Constantly seeing her and losing her like that I followed till I came to the Seine, and there I saw her standing at an opening in the wall, looking down into the river. Then she vanished, and I cannot tell why, but I went to the opening in the wall and stood there, just as she had stood, taking just the same attitude. Then I thought I was in Scotland, and that I heard a sheep bell. After that I must have lost consciousness, for I knew nothing till I found myself lying on my back, dripping wet, and people standing all round. I had thrown myself into the Seine.”

I did not believe him, and not because I thought the story impossible, for I knew he had a susceptibility beyond that of any one I had ever known, to

symbolic or telepathic influence, but because he never told one anything that was true; the facts of life disturbed him and were forgotten. The story had been created by the influence but it had remained a reverie, though he may in the course of years have come to believe that it happened as an event. The affectionate husband of his admiring and devoted wife, he had created an imaginary beloved, had attributed to her the authorship of all his books that had any talent, and though habitually a sober man, I have known him to get drunk, and at the height of his intoxication when most men speak the truth, to attribute his state to remorse for having been unfaithful to Fiona Macleod.

Paul Verlaine alternated between the two halves of his nature with so little apparent resistance that he seemed like a bad child, though to read his sacred poems is to remember perhaps that the Holy Infant shared His first home with the beasts. In what month was it that I received a note inviting me to "coffee and cigarettes plentifully," and signed "Yours quite cheerfully, Paul Verlaine?" I found him at the top of a tenement house in the Rue St. Jacques, sitting in an easy chair, his bad leg swaddled in many bandages. He asked me, speaking in English, if I knew Paris well, and added, pointing to his leg, that it had scorched his leg for he know it "well, too well" and "lived in it like a fly in a pot of marmalade." He took up an English dictionary, one of the few books in the room, and began searching for the name of his disease, selecting after a long search and with, as I understood, only comparative accuracy "Erysipelas." Meanwhile his homely, middle-aged mistress made the coffee and found the cigarettes; it was obviously she who had given the room its character; her canaries in several cages hanging in the window, and her sentimental lithographs nailed here and there among the nude drawings and newspaper caricatures of her lover as various kinds of monkey, which he had pinned upon the wall. A

slovenly, ragged man came in, his trousers belted with a piece of rope and an opera hat upon his head. She drew a box over to the fire, and he sat down, now holding the opera hat upon his knees, and I think he must have acquired it very lately for he kept constantly closing and opening it. Verlaine introduced him by saying, “He is a poor man, but a good fellow, and is so like Louis XI to look at that we call him Louis the XIth.” I remember that Verlaine talked of Victor Hugo who was “a supreme poet, but a volcano of mud as well as of flame,” and of Villiers de L’Isle Adam who was “exalté” and wrote excellent French; and of *In Memoriam*, which he had tried to translate and could not. “Tennyson is too noble, too Anglais; when he should have been brokenhearted, he had many reminiscences.”

At Verlaine’s burial, but a few months after, his mistress quarrelled with a publisher at the graveside as to who owned the sheet by which the body had been covered, and Louis XI stole fourteen umbrellas that he found leaning against a tree in the Cemetery.

XIX

I am certain of one date, for I have gone to much trouble to get it right. I met John Synge for the first time in the Autumn of 1896, when I was one and thirty, and he four and twenty. I was at the Hotel Corneille instead of my usual lodging, and why I cannot remember for I thought it expensive. Synge’s biographer says that you boarded there for a pound a week, but I was accustomed to cook my own breakfast, and dine at an anarchist restaurant in the Boulevard S. Jacques for little over a shilling. Some one, whose name I forget, told me there was a poor Irishman at the top of the house, and presently introduced us. Synge had come lately from Italy, and had played his fiddle to peasants in the Black Forest; six months of travel

upon fifty pounds; and was now reading French literature and writing morbid and melancholy verse. He told me that he had learned Irish at Trinity College, so I urged him to go to the Aran Islands and find a life that had never been expressed in literature, instead of a life where all had been expressed. I did not divine his genius, but I felt he needed something to take him out of his morbidity and melancholy. Perhaps I would have given the same advice to any young Irish writer who knew Irish, for I had been that summer upon Inishmaan and Inishmore, and was full of the subject. My friends and I had landed from a fishing boat to find ourselves among a group of islanders, one of whom said he would bring us to the oldest man upon Inishmaan. This old man, speaking very slowly, but with laughing eyes, had said, "If any gentleman has done a crime, we'll hide him. There was a gentleman that killed his father, and I had him in my own house six months till he got away to America."

From that on I saw much of Synge, and brought him to Maude Gonne's, under whose persuasion perhaps, he joined the "Young Ireland Society of Paris," the name we gave to half a dozen Parisian Irish, signed, but resigned after a few months because "it wanted to stir up Continental nations against England, and England will never give us freedom until she feels she is safe," the one political sentence I ever heard him speak. Over a year was to pass before he took my advice and settled for a while in an Aran cottage, and became happy, having escaped at last, as he wrote, "from the squalor of the poor and the nullity of the rich." I almost forget the prose and verse he showed me in Paris, though I read it all through again when after his death I decided, at his written request, what was to be published and what not. Indeed, I have but a vague impression, as of a man trying to look out of a window and blurring all that he sees by breathing upon the window. According to my Lunar parable, he was a man of the twenty-third Phase, a

man whose subjective lives — for a constant return to our life is a part of my dream — were over, who must not pursue an image, but fly from it, all that subjective dreaming, that had once been power and joy, now corrupting within him. He had to take the first plunge into the world beyond himself, the first plunge away from himself that is always pure technique, the delight in doing, not because one would or should, but merely because one can do.

He once said to me, "a man has to bring up his family and be as virtuous as is compatible with so doing, and if he does more than that he is a puritan; a dramatist has to express his subject and to find as much beauty as is compatible with that, and if he does more he is an aesthete," that is to say, he was consciously objective. Whenever he tried to write drama without dialect he wrote badly, and he made several attempts, because only through dialect could he escape self-expression, see all that he did from without, allow his intellect to judge the images of his mind as if they had been created by some other mind. His objectivity was, however, technical only, for in those images paraded all the desires of his heart. He was timid, too shy for general conversation, an invalid and full of moral scruple, and he was to create now some ranting braggadocio, now some tipsy hag full of poetical speech, and now some young man or girl full of the most abounding health. He never spoke an unkind word, had admirable manners, and yet his art was to fill the streets with rioters, and to bring upon his dearest friends enemies that may last their lifetime.

No mind can engender till divided into two, but that of a Keats or a Shelley falls into an intellectual part that follows, and a hidden emotional flying image, whereas in a mind like that of Synge the emotional part is dreaded and stagnant, while the intellectual part is a clear mirror-like technical achievement.

But in writing of Synge I have run far ahead, for in 1896 he was but one picture among many. I am often astonished when I think that we can meet unmoved some person, or pass some house, that in later years is to bear a chief part in our life. Should there not be some flutter of the nerve or stopping of the heart like that Macgregor experienced at the first meeting with a phantom?

XX

Many pictures come before me without date or order. I am walking somewhere near the Luxembourg Gardens when Synge, who seldom generalises and only after much thought, says, “There are three things any two of which have often come together but never all three; ecstasy, asceticism, austerity; I wish to bring all three together.”

……

I notice that Macgregor considers William Sharp vague and sentimental, while Sharp is repelled by Macgregor’s hardness and arrogance. William Sharp met Macgregor in the Louvre, and said, “No doubt considering your studies you live upon milk and fruit.” And Macgregor replied, “No, not exactly milk and fruit, but very nearly so;” and now Sharp has lunched with Macgregor and been given nothing but brandy and radishes.

……

Macgregor is much troubled by ladies who seek spiritual advice, and one has called to ask his help against phantoms who have the appearance of decayed corpses, and try to get into bed with her at night. He has driven her away with one furious sentence, “Very bad taste on both sides.”

……

I am sitting in a Café with two French Americans, one in the morning, while we are talking wildly, and some are dancing, there is a tap at the shuttered window; we open it and three ladies enter, the wife of a man of letters, who thought to find no one but a confederate, and her husband's two young sisters whom she has brought secretly to some disreputable dance. She is very confused at seeing us, but as she looks from one to another understands that we have taken some drug and laughs; caught in our dream we know vaguely that she is scandalous according to our code and to all codes, but smile at her benevolently and laugh.

……

I am at Stuart Merrill's, and I meet there a young Jewish Persian scholar. He has a large gold ring, seemingly very rough, made by some amateur, and he shows me that it has shaped itself to his finger, and says, "That is because it contains no alloy — it is alchemical gold." I ask who made the gold, and he says a certain Rabbi, and begins to talk of the Rabbi's miracles. We do not question him — perhaps it is true — perhaps he has imagined at all — we are inclined to accept every historical belief once more.

……

I am sitting in a Cafe with two French Americans, a German poet Douchenday, and a silent man whom I discover to be Strindberg, and who is looking for the Philosopher's Stone. The French American reads out a manifesto he is about to issue to the Latin Quarter; it proposes to establish a communistic colony of artists in Virginia, and there is a footnote to explain why he selects Virginia, "Art has never flourished twice in the same place. Art has never flourished in Virginia."

Douchenday, who has some reputation as a poet, explains that his poems are without verbs, as the verb is the root of all evil in the world. He wishes for an art where all things are immoveable, as though the clouds should be

made of marble. I turn over the page of one of his books which he shows me, and find there a poem in dramatic form, but when I ask if he hopes to have it played he says: — "It could only be played by actors before a black marble wall, with masks in their hands. They must not wear the masks for that would not express my scorn for reality."

……..

I go to the first performance of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, at the Théatre de L'Oeuvre, with the Rhymer who had been so attractive to the girl in the bicycling costume. The audience shake their fists at one another, and the Rhymer whispers to me, "There are often duels after these performances," and he explains to me what is happening on the stage. The players are supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs, and I can see for myself that the chief personage, who is some kind of King, carries for Sceptre a brush of the kind that we use to clean a closet. Feeling bound to support the most spirited party, we have shouted for the play, but that night at the Hotel Corneille I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more. I say, "After Stephane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God."

BOOK V: THE STIRRING OF THE BONES

I

It may have been the Spring of 1897 that Maud Gonne, who was passing through London, told me that for some reason unknown to her, she had failed to get a Dublin authorization for an American lecturing tour. The young Dublin Nationalists planned a monument to Wolfe Tone which, it was hoped, might exceed in bulk and in height that of the too compromised and compromising Daniel O'Connell, and she proposed to raise money for it by these lectures. I had left the Temple and taken two rooms in Bloomsbury, and in Bloomsbury lived important London Nationalists, elderly doctors, who had been medical students during the Fenian movement. So I was able to gather a sufficient committee to pass the necessary resolution. She had no sooner sailed than I found out why the Dublin committee had refused it, or rather put it off by delay and vague promises. A prominent Irish American had been murdered for political reasons, and another Irish American had been tried and acquitted, but was still accused by his political opponents, and the dispute had spread to London and to Ireland, and had there intermixed itself with current politics and gathered new bitterness. My committee, and the majority of the Nationalist Irish Societies throughout England were upon one side, and the Dublin committee and the majority of the Nationalist Societies in Ireland upon the other, and feeling ran high. Maud Gonne had the same friends that I had, and the Dublin committee could not be made to understand that whatever money she collected would go to the movement, and not to her friends and their opponents. It seemed to me that if I accepted the Presidency of the '98 Commemoration Association of Great Britain, I might be able to prevent a public quarrel, and so make a great central council

possible; and a public quarrel I did prevent, though with little gain perhaps to anybody, for at least one active man assured me that I had taken the heart out of his work, and no gain at all perhaps to the movement, for our central council had commonly to send two organizers or to print two pamphlets, that both parties might be represented when one pamphlet or one organizer had served.

II

It was no business of mine, and that was precisely why I could not keep out of it. Every enterprise that offered, allured just in so far as it was not my business. I still think that in a species of man, wherein I count myself, nothing so much matters as Unity of Being, but if I seek it as Goethe sought, who was not of that species, I but combine in myself, and perhaps as it now seems, looking backward, in others also, incompatibles. Goethe, in whom objectivity and subjectivity were intermixed I hold, as the dark is mixed with the light at the eighteenth Lunar Phase, could but seek it as Wilhelm Meister seeks it intellectually, critically, and through a multitude of deliberately chosen experiences; events and forms of skill gathered as if for a collector's cabinet; whereas true Unity of Being, where all the nature murmurs in response if but a single note be touched, is found emotionally, instinctively, by the rejection of all experience not of the right quality, and by the limitation of its quantity. Of all this I knew nothing, for I saw the world by the light of what my father had said, speaking about some Frenchman who frequented the dissecting rooms to overcome his dread in the interest of that Unity. My father had mocked, but had not explained why he had mocked, and I, for my unhappiness had felt a shuddering fascination. Nor did I understand as yet how little that Unity, however wisely sought, is

possible without a Unity of Culture in class or people that is no longer possible at all.

“The fascination of what’s difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart.”

III

I went hither and thither speaking at meetings in England and Scotland and occasionally at tumultuous Dublin conventions, and endured some of the worst months of my life. I had felt years before that I had made a great achievement when the man who trained my uncle’s horses invited me to share his Xmas dinner, which we roasted in front of his harness room fire; and now I took an almost equal pride in an evening spent with some small organizer into whose spitoon I secretly poured my third glass of whiskey. I constantly hoped for some gain in self-possession, in rapidity of decision, in capacity for disguise, and am at this moment, I dare say, no different for it all, having but burgeoned and withered like a tree.

When Maud Gonne returned she became our directing mind both in England and in Ireland, and it was mainly at her bidding that our movement become a protest against the dissensions, the lack of dignity, of the Parnellite and Anti-Parnellite parties, who had fought one another for seven or eight years, till busy men passed them by, as they did those performing cats that in my childhood I used to see, pretending to spit at one another on a table, outside Charing Cross station. Both parliamentary parties seeing that all young Ireland, and a good part of old, were in the movement, tried

to join us, the Anti-Parnellite without abandoning its separate identity. They were admitted I think, but upon what terms I do not remember. I and two or three others had to meet Michael Davitt, and a member of parliament called F. X. O'Brien to talk out the question of separate identity, and I remember nothing of what passed but the manner and image of Michael Davitt. He seemed hardly more unfitted for such negotiation, perhaps even for any possible present politics, than I myself, and I watched him with sympathy. One knows by the way a man sits in his chair if he have emotional intensity, and Davitt's suggested to me a writer, a painter, an artist of some kind, rather than a man of action. Then, too, F. X. O'Brien did not care whether he used a good or a bad argument, whether he seemed a fool or a clever man, so that he carried his point, but if he used a bad argument Davitt would bring our thought back to it though he had to wait several minutes and re-state it. One felt that he had lived always with small unimaginative, effective men whom he despised; and that perhaps through some lack of early education, perhaps because nine years' imprisonment at the most plastic period of his life had jarred or broken his contact with reality, he had failed, except during the first months of the Land League, to dominate those men. He told me that if the split in the Irish Party had not come he would have carried the Land League into the Highlands, and recovered for Ireland as much of Scotland as was still Gaelic in blood or in language. Our negotiations, which interested so much F. X. O'Brien and my two negotiators, a barrister and a doctor, bored him I thought, even more than they did me, to whom they were a novelty; but the Highland plan with its historical foundation and its vague possibilities excited him, and it seemed to me that what we said or did stirred him, at other moments also, to some similar remote thought and emotion. I think he returned my sympathy, for a little before his death he replied to some words of congratulation I sent him

after the speech in which he resigned his seat in the House of Commons, with an account of some project of his for improving the quality of the Irish representation there.

IV

I think that he shared with poet and philosopher the necessity of speaking the whole mind or remaining silent or ineffective, and he had been for years in a movement, where, to adapt certain words of a friend of mine, it was as essential to carry the heart upon the sleeve as the tongue in the cheek. The founders of the Irish Agrarian movement had acted upon the doctrine, contradicted by religious history, that ignorant men will not work for an idea, or feel a political passion for its own sake, and that you must find "a lever" as it was called, some practical grievance; and I do not think that I am fantastic in believing that this faith in "levers," universal among revolutionaries, is but a result of that mechanical philosophy of the Eighteenth Century, which has, as Coleridge said, turned the human mind into the quicksilver at the back of a mirror, though it still permits a work of art to seem "a mirror dawdling along a road."

O'Leary had told me the story, not I think hitherto published. A prominent Irish American, not long released from the prison where Fenianism had sent him, cabled to Parnell: — "Take up Land Reform side by side with the National Question and we will support you. See Kickham." What had Parnell, a landowner and a haughty man, to do with the peasant or the peasant's grievance? And he was indeed so ignorant of both that he asked Kickham, novelist and Fenian leader, if he thought the people would take up a land agitation, and Kickham answered: — "I am only afraid they

would go to the Gates of Hell for it;" and O'Leary's comment was, "and so they have."

And so was founded an agitation where some men pretended to national passion for the land's sake; some men to agrarian passion for the nation's sake; some men to both for their own advancement, and this agitation at the time I write of had but old men to serve it, who found themselves after years of labour, some after years of imprisonment, derided for unscrupulous rascals. Unscrupulous they certainly were, for they had grown up amid make-believe, and now because their practical grievance was too near settlement to blind and to excite, their make-believe was visible to all. They were as eloquent as ever, they had never indeed shared anything in common but the sentimental imagery, the poetical allusions inherited from a still earlier generation, but were faced by a generation that had turned against all oratory. I recall to my memory a member of Parliament who had fought for Parnell's policy after Parnell's death, and much against his own interest, who refused to attend a meeting my friends had summoned at the declaration of the Boer War, because he thought "England was in the right," and yet a week later when the Dublin mob had taken the matter up, advised Irish soldiers to shoot their officers and join President Kruger. I recall another and more distinguished politician who supported the Anti-Parnellite Party in his declining years, and in his vigorous years had raked up some scandal about some Colonial Governor. A friend of mine, after advising that Governor's son to write his father's life, had remembered the scandal and called in her alarm upon the politician; "I do beseech you," he had said and with the greatest earnestness, "to pay no attention whatever to anything I may have said during an election."

Certain of these men, all public prepossessions laid aside, were excellent talkers, genial and friendly men, with memories enriched by country

humour, and much half sentimental, half practical philosophy, and at moments by poetical feeling that was not all an affectation, found very moving by English sympathisers, of the tear and the smile in Erin's eye. They may even have had more sincerity than their sort elsewhere, but they had inherited a cause that men had died for, and they themselves had gone to jail for it, and had so worn their hereditary martyrdom that they had seemed for a time no common men, and now must pay the penalty. "I have just told Mahaffy," Wilde had said to me, "that it is a party of men of genius," and now John O'Leary, Taylor, and many obscure sincere men had pulled them down; and yet, should what followed, judged by an eye that thinks most of the individual soul, be counted as more clearly out of the common? A movement first of poetry, then of sentimentality, and land hunger, had struggled with, and as the nation passed into the second period of all revolutions, had given way before a movement of abstraction and hatred; and after some twenty years of the second period, though abstraction and hatred have won their victory, there is no clear sign, of a third, a *tertium quid*, and a reasonable frame of mind.

Seeing that only the individual soul can attain to its spiritual opposite, a nation in tumult must needs pass to and fro between mechanical opposites, but one hopes always that those opposites may acquire sex and engender. At moments when I have thought of the results of political subjection upon Ireland I have remembered a story told me by Oscar Wilde who professed to have found it in a book of magic, "if you carve a Cerberus upon an emerald," he said, "and put it in the oil of a lamp and carry it into a room where your enemy is, two heads will come upon his shoulders and devour one another."

Instead of sharing our traditional sentimental rhetoric with every man who had found a practical grievance, whether one care a button for the

grievance or not, most of us were prosecuting heretics. Nationality was like religion, few could be saved, and meditation had but one theme — the perfect nation and its perfect service. “Public opinion,” said an anonymous postcard sent to a friend of mine, “will compel you to learn Irish,” and it certainly did compel many persons of settled habits to change tailor and cloth. I believed myself dressed according to public opinion, until a letter of apology from my tailor informed me that “It takes such a long time getting Connemara cloth as it has to come all the way from Scotland.”

The Ireland of men’s affections must be, as it were, self-moving, self-creating, though as yet (avoiding a conclusion that seemed hopeless) but few added altogether separate from England politically. Men for the moment were less concerned with the final achievement than with independence from English parties and influence during the struggle for it. We had no longer any leaders, abstractions were in their place; and our Conventions, where O’Leary presided interrupting discussion without the least consideration for rules of procedure when the moment came for his cup of coffee, were dominated by little groups, the Gaelic propagandists, though still very few, being the most impassioned, which had the intensity and narrowness of theological sects.

I had in my head a project to reconcile old and new that gave Maud Gonne and myself many stirring conversations upon journeys by rail to meetings in Scotland, in Dublin, or in the Midlands. Should we not persuade the organizations in Dublin and in London, when the time drew near for the unveiling of our statue, or even perhaps for the laying of its foundation stone, to invite the leaders of Parnellite or Anti-Parnellite, of the new group of Unionists who had almost changed sides in their indignation at the over-taxation of Ireland, to lay their policy before our Convention — could we not then propose and carry that the Convention sit

permanently, or appoint some Executive Committee to direct Irish policy and report from time to time. The total withdrawal from Westminster had been proposed in the ‘Seventies, before the two devouring heads were of equal strength, and now that the abstract head seemed the strongest, would be proposed again, but the Convention could send them thither, not as an independent power, but as its delegation, and only when, and for what purpose the Convention might decide. I dreaded some wild Fenian movement, and with literature perhaps more in my mind than politics, dreamed of that Unity of Culture which might begin with some few men controlling some form of administration. I began to talk my project over with various organizers, who often interrupted their attention which was perhaps only politeness, with some new jibe at Mr. Dillon or Mr. Redmond. I thought I had Maud Gonne’s support, but when I overheard her conversation, she commonly urged the entire withdrawal of the Irish Members, or if she did refer to my scheme, it was to suggest the sending to England of eighty ragged and drunken Dublin beggars or eighty pugilists “to be paid by results.”

She was the first who spoke publicly or semi-publicly of the withdrawal of the Irish Members as a practical policy for our time, so far as I know, but others may have been considering it. A nation in crisis becomes almost like a single mind, or rather like those minds I have described that become channels for parallel streams of thought, each stream taking the colour of the mind it flows through. These streams are not set moving, as I think, through conversation or publication, but through “telepathic contact” at some depth below that of normal consciousness, and it is only years afterwards, when future events have shown the themes’ importance, that we discover that they are different expressions of a common theme. That self-moving, self-creating nation necessitated an Irish centre of policy, and I

planned a premature impossible peace between those two devouring heads because I was sedentary and thoughtful; but Maud Gonne was not sedentary, and I noticed that before some great event she did not think but became exceedingly superstitous. Are not such as she aware, at moments of great crisis, of some power beyond their own minds; or are they like some good portrait painter of my father's generation and only think when the model is under their eye? Once upon the eve of some demonstration, I found her with many caged larks and finches which she was about to set free for the luck's sake.

I abandoned my plans on discovering that our young men, not yet educated by Mr. Birrell's university, would certainly shout down everyone they disagreed with, and that their finance was so extravagant that we must content ourselves with a foundation stone and an iron rail to protect it, for there could never be a statue; while she carried out every plan she made.

Her power over crowds was at its height, and some portion of the power came because she could still, even when pushing an abstract principle to what seemed to me an absurdity, keep her own mind free, and so when men and women did her bidding they did it not only because she was beautiful, but because that beauty suggested joy and freedom. Besides there was an element in her beauty that moved minds full of old Gaelic stories and poems, for she looked as though she lived in an ancient civilization where all superiorities whether of the mind or the body were a part of public ceremonial, were in some way the crowd's creation, as the Pope entering the Vatican is the crowd's creation. Her beauty, backed by her great stature, could instantly affect an assembly, and not as often with our stage beauties because obvious and florid, for it was incredibly distinguished, and if — as must be that it might seem that assembly's very self, fused, unified, and solitary — her face, like the face of some Greek statue, showed little

thought, her whole body seemed a master work of long labouring thought, as though a Scopas had measured and calculated, consorted with Egyptian sages, and mathematicians out of Babylon, that he might outface even Artemisia's sepulchral image with a living norm.

But in that ancient civilization abstract thought scarce existed, while she but rose partially and for a moment out of raging abstraction; and for that reason, as I have known another woman do, she hated her own beauty, not its effect upon others, but its image in the mirror. Beauty is from the antithetical self, and a woman can scarce but hate it, for not only does it demand a painful daily service, but it calls for the denial or the dissolution of the self.

"How many centuries spent
The sedentary soul,
In toil of measurement
Beyond eagle or mole
Beyond hearing and seeing
Or Archimedes' guess,
To raise into being
That loveliness?"

V

On the morning of the great procession, the greatest in living memory, the Parnellite and Anti-Parnellite members of Parliament, huddled together like cows in a storm, gather behind our carriage, and I hear John Redmond say to certain of his late enemies, "I went up nearer the head of the Procession, but one of the Marshals said, 'This is not your place, Mr

Redmond; your place is further back.' 'No,' I said, 'I will stay here.' 'In that case,' he said, 'I will lead you back.'" Later on I can see by the pushing and shouldering of a delegate from South Africa how important place and procedure is; and noticing that Maud Gonne is cheered everywhere, and that the Irish Members march through street after street without welcome, I wonder if their enemies have not intended their humiliation.

……

We are at the Mansion House Banquet, and John Dillon is making the first speech he has made before a popular Dublin audience since the death of Parnell; and I have several times to keep my London delegates from interrupting. Dillon is very nervous, and as I watch him the abstract passion begins to rise within me, and I am almost overpowered by an instinct of cruelty; I long to cry out, "Had Zimri peace who slew his master?"

……

Is our Foundation Stone still unlaid when the more important streets are decorated for Queen Victoria's Jubilee?

I find Maud Gonne at her hotel talking to a young working-man who looks very melancholy. She had offered to speak at one of the regular meetings of his socialist society about Queen Victoria, and he has summoned what will be a great meeting in the open air. She has refused to speak, and he says that her refusal means his ruin, as nobody will ever believe that he had any promise at all. When he has left without complaint or anger, she gives me very cogent reasons against the open air meeting, but I can think of nothing but the young man and his look of melancholy. He has left his address, and presently at my persuasion, she drives to his tenement, where she finds him and his wife and children crowded into a very small space — perhaps there was only one room — and, moved by

the sight, promises to speak. The young man is James Connolly who, with Padraic Pearce, is to make the Insurrection of 1916 and to be executed.

……

The meeting is held in College Green and is very crowded, and Maud Gonne speaks, I think, standing upon a chair. In front of her is an old woman with a miniature of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, which she waves in her excitement, crying out, "I was in it before she was born." Maud Gonne tells how that morning she had gone to lay a wreath upon a martyr's tomb at St. Michael's Church, for it is the one day in the year when such wreaths are laid, but has been refused admission because it is the Jubilee. Then she pauses, and after that her voice rises to a cry, "Must the graves of our dead go undecorated because Victoria has her Jubilee?"

……

It is eight or nine at night, and she and I have come from the City Hall, where the Convention has been sitting, that we may walk to the National Club in Rutland Square, and we find a great crowd in the street, who surround us and accompany us. Presently I hear a sound of breaking glass, the crowd has begun to stone the windows of decorated houses, and when I try to speak that I may restore order, I discover that I have lost my voice through much speaking at the Convention. I can only whisper and gesticulate, and as I am thus freed from responsibility, I share the emotion of the crowd, and perhaps even feel as they feel when the glass crashes. Maud Gonne has a look of exultation as she walks with her laughing head thrown back.

Later that night Connolly carries in procession a coffin with the words "British Empire" upon it, and police and mob fight for its ownership, and at last that the police may not capture, it is thrown into the Liffey. And there are fights between police and window-breakers, and I read in the morning

papers that many have been wounded; some two hundred heads have been dressed at the hospitals; an old woman killed by baton blows, or perhaps trampled under the feet of the crowd; and that two thousand pounds worth of decorated plate glass windows have been broken. I count the links in the chain of responsibility, run them across my fingers, and wonder if any link there is from my workshop.

……

Queen Victoria visits the city, and Dublin Unionists have gathered together from all Ireland some twelve thousand children and built for them a grandstand, and bought them sweets and buns that they may cheer. A week later Maud Gonne marches forty thousand children through the streets of Dublin, and in a field beyond Drumcondra, and in the presence of a Priest of their Church, they swear to cherish towards England until the freedom of Ireland has been won, an undying enmity.

How many of these children will carry bomb or rifle when a little under or a little over thirty?

……

Feeling is still running high between the Dublin and London organizations, for a London doctor, my fellow-delegate, has called a little after breakfast to say he was condemned to death by a certain secret society the night before. He is very angry, though it does not seem that his life is in danger, for the insult is beyond endurance.

……

We arrive at Chancery Lane for our Committee meeting, but it is Derby Day, and certain men who have arranged a boxing match are in possession of our rooms. We adjourn to a neighbouring public-house where there are little pannelled cubicles as in an old-fashioned eating house, that we may direct the secretary how to answer that week's letters. We are much

interrupted by a committee man who has been to the Derby, and now, half lying on the table, keeps repeating, “I know what you all think. Let us hand on the torch, you think, let us hand it on to our children, but I say no! I say, let us order an immediate rising.”

Presently one of the boxers arrives, sent up to apologise it seems, and to explain that we had not been recognized. He begins his apology but stops, and for a moment fixes upon us a meditative critical eye. “No, I will not,” he cries. “What do I care for anyone now but Venus and Adonis and the other Planets of Heaven.”

……..

French sympathisers have been brought to see the old buildings in Galway, and with the towns of Southern France in their mind’s eye, are not in the least moved. The greater number are in a small crowded hotel. Presently an acquaintance of mine, peeping, while it is still broad day, from his bedroom window, sees the proprietress of the hotel near the hall door, and in the road a serious-minded, quixotic Dublin barrister, with a little boy who carries from a stick over his shoulder twelve chamber pots. He hears one angry, and one soft pleading explanatory voice, “But, Madam, I feel certain that at the unexpected arrival of so many guests, so many guests of the Nation, I may say, you must have found yourself unprepared.” “Never have I been so insulted.” “Madam, I am thinking of the honour of my country.”

……..

I am at Maud Gonne’s hotel, and an Italian sympathiser Cipriani, the friend of Garibaldi, is there, and though an old man now, he is the handsomest man I have ever seen. I am telling a ghost story in English at one end of the room, and he is talking politics in French at the other. Somebody says, “Yeats believes in ghosts,” and Cipriani interrupts for a

moment his impassioned declamation to say in English, and with a magnificent movement and intonation, “As for me, I believe in nothing but cannon.”

……

I call at the office of the Dublin organization in Westmoreland Street, and find the front door open, and the office door open, and though the office is empty the cupboard door open and eighteen pounds in gold upon the shelf.

……

At a London Committee meeting I notice a middle-aged man who slips into the room for a moment, whispers something to the secretary, lays three or four shillings on a table, and slips out. I am told that he is an Irish board-school teacher who, in early life, took an oath neither to drink nor smoke, but to contribute the amount so saved weekly to the Irish Cause.

……

VI

A few months before I was drawn into politics, I made a friendship that was to make possible that old project of an Irish Theatre. Arthur Symons and I were staying at Tillyra Castle in County Galway with Mr. Edward Martyn, when Lady Gregory, whom I had met once in London for a few minutes drove over, and after Symon’s return to London I stayed at her house, which is some four miles from Tillyra. I was in poor health, the strain of youth had been greater than it commonly is, even with imaginative men, who must always, I think, find youth bitter, and I had lost myself besides as I had done periodically for years, upon *Hodos Camelionis*. The first time was in my eighteenth or nineteenth years, when I tried to create a

more multitudinous dramatic form, and now I had got there through a novel that I could neither write nor cease to write which had *Hodos Camelionis* for its theme. My chief person was to see all the modern visionary sects pass before his bewildered eyes, as Flaubert's St. Anthony saw the Christian sects, and I was as helpless to create artistic, as my chief person to create philosophic order. It was not that I do not love order, or that I lack capacity for it, but that — and not in the arts and in thought only — I outrun my strength. It is not so much that I choose too many elements, as that the possible unities themselves seem without number, like those angels, that in Henry More's paraphrase of the Schoolman's problem, dance spurred and booted upon the point of a needle. Perhaps fifty years ago I had been in less trouble, but what can one do when the age itself has come to *Hodos Camelionis*?

Lady Gregory seeing that I was ill brought me from cottage to cottage to gather folk-belief, tales of the fairies, and the like, and wrote down herself what we had gathered, considering that this work, in which one let others talk, and walked about the fields so much, would lie, to use a country phrase, "Very light upon the mind." She asked me to return there the next year, and for years to come I was to spend my summers at her house. When I was in good health again, I found myself indolent, partly perhaps because I was affrighted by that impossible novel, and asked her to send me to my work every day at eleven, and at some other hour to my letters, rating me with idleness if need be, and I doubt if I should have done much with my life but for her firmness and her care. After a time, though not very quickly, I recovered tolerable industry, though it has only been of late years that I have found it possible to face an hour's verse without a preliminary struggle and much putting off.

Certain woods at Sligo, the woods above Dooney Rock and those above the waterfall at Ben Bulben, though I shall never perhaps walk there again, are so deep in my affections that I dream about them at night; and yet the woods at Coole, though they do not come into my dream are so much more knitted to my thought, that when I am dead they will have, I am persuaded, my longest visit. When we are dead, according to my belief, we live our lives backward for a certain number of years, treading the paths that we have trodden, growing young again, even childish again, till some attain an innocence that is no longer a mere accident of nature, but the human intellect's crowning achievement. It was at Coole that the first few simple thoughts that now, grown complex, through their contact with other thoughts, explain the world, came to me from beyond my own mind. I practised meditations, and these, as I think, so affected my sleep that I began to have dreams that differed from ordinary dreams in seeming to take place amid brilliant light, and by their invariable coherence, and certain half-dreams, if I can call them so, between sleep and waking. I have noticed that such experiences come to me most often amid distraction, at some time that seems of all times the least fitting, as though it were necessary for the exterior mind to be engaged elsewhere, and it was during 1897 and 1898, when I was always just arriving from or just setting out to some political meeting, that the first dreams came. I was crossing a little stream near Inchy Wood and actually in the middle of a stride from bank to bank, when an emotion never experienced before swept down upon me. I said, "That is what the devout Christian feels, that is how he surrenders his will to the will of God." I felt an extreme surprise for my whole imagination was preoccupied with the pagan mythology of ancient Ireland, I was marking in red ink upon a large map, every sacred mountain. The next morning I awoke near dawn, to hear a voice saying, "The love of God is infinite for

every human soul because every human soul is unique, no other can satisfy the same need in God."

Lady Gregory and I had heard many tales of changelings, grown men and women as well as children, who as the people believe are taken by the fairies, some spirit or inanimate object bewitched into their likeness remaining in their stead, and I constantly asked myself what reality there could be in these tales, often supported by so much testimony. I woke one night to find myself lying upon my back with all my limbs rigid, and to hear a ceremonial measured voice which did not seem to be mine speaking through my lips, "We make an image of him who sleeps," it said, "and it is not him who sleeps, and we call it Emmanuel." After many years that thought, others often found as strangely being added to it, became the thought of the Mask, which I have used in these memoirs to explain men's characters. A few months ago at Oxford I was asking myself why it should be "An image of him who sleeps," and took down from the shelf not knowing why I was doing so, a book which I had never read, Burkitt's *Early Eastern Christianity*, and opened it at random. My eyes lit upon a passage from a Gnostic Hymn telling how a certain King's son being exiled, slept in Egypt, a symbol of the natural state, and while he slept an Angel brought him a royal mantle; and at the bottom of the page I found a footnote saying that the word mantle did not represent the meaning properly for that which the Angel gave had the exile's own form and likeness. I did not, however, find in the Gnostic Hymn my other thought that Egypt and that which the Mask represents are antithetical. That, I think, became clear, though I had had some premonitions when a countryman told Lady Gregory and myself that he had heard the crying of new-dropped lambs in November — Spring in the world of Fairy, being November with us.

……

On the sea coast at Duras, a few miles from Coole, an old French Count, Florimond de Bastero, lived for certain months in every year. Lady Gregory and I talked over my project of an Irish Theatre looking out upon the lawn of his house, watching a large flock of ducks that was always gathered for his arrival from Paris, and that would be a very small flock, if indeed it were a flock at all, when he set out for Rome in the autumn. I told her that I had given up my project because it was impossible to get the few pounds necessary for a start in little halls, and she promised to collect or give the money necessary. That was her first great service to the Irish intellectual movement. She reminded me the other day that when she first asked me what she could do to help our movement I suggested nothing; and, certainly, no more foresaw her genius that I foresaw that of John Synge, nor had she herself foreseen it. Our theatre had been established before she wrote or had any ambition to write, and yet her little comedies have merriment and beauty, an unusual combination, and those two volumes where the Irish heroic tales are arranged and translated in an English so simple and so noble, may do more than other books to deepen Irish imagination. They contain our ancient literature, are something better than our *Mabinogion*, are almost our *Morte D'Arthur*. It is more fitting, however, that in a book of memoirs I should speak of her personal influence, and especially as no witness is likely to arise better qualified to speak. If that influence were lacking, Ireland would be greatly impoverished, so much has been planned out in the library, or among the woods at Coole; for it was there that John Shawe Taylor found the independence from class and family that made him summon the conference between landlord and tenant, that brought land purchase, and it was there that Hugh Lane formed those Irish ambitions that led to his scattering many

thousands, and gathering much ingratitude; and where, but for that conversation at Florimond de Bastero's, had been the genius of Synge?

I have written these words instead of leaving all to posterity, and though my friend's ear seems indifferent to praise or blame, that young men to whom recent events are often more obscure than those long past, may learn what debts they owe and to what creditor.

THE END.

Dramatis Personae 1896-1902

I

When I was thirty years old the three great demesnes of three Galway houses, Coole House, Tulira Castle, Roxborough House, lay within a half-hour or two hours' walk of each other. They were so old they seemed unchanging; now all have been divided among small farmers, their great ancient trees cut down. Roxborough House was burnt down during the Civil War; Coole House has passed to the Forestry Department; but Tulira Castle is inhabited by blood relatives of those who built it. I went there for the first time with Arthur Symons, then editor of the Savoy magazine. I was taking him here and there through Ireland. We had just been sightseeing in Sligo. Edward Martyn, met in London, perhaps with George Moore, had seemed so heavy, uncouth, countrified that I said as we turned in at the gate: 'We shall be waited on by a barefooted servant'. I was recalling a house seen at Sligo when a child. Then I saw the great trees, then the grey wall of the Castle.

Edward Martyn brought us up the wide stairs of his Gothic hall decorated by Crace and showed us our rooms. 'You can take your choice', he said. I took out a penny to toss, shocking Symons, who was perhaps all the more impressed by his surroundings because of what I had said about bare feet. I think the man of letters has powers of make-believe denied to the painter or the architect. We both knew that those pillars, that stair and varnished roof with their mechanical ornament, were among the worst inventions of the Gothic revival, but upon several evenings we asked

Edward Martyn to extinguish all light except that of a little Roman lamp, sat there in the shadows, as though upon a stage set for Parsifal. Edward Martyn sat at his harmonium, so placed among the pillars that it seemed some ancient instrument, and played Palestrina. He hated that house in all its detail---it had been built by his mother when he was a very young man to replace some plain eighteenth- century house---all except an ancient tower where he had his study. A fire had destroyed the old house, and whatever old furniture or pictures the family possessed, as though fate had deliberately prepared for an abstract mind that would see nothing in life but its vulgarity and temptations. In the tower room, in a light filtered through small stained-glass windows, without any quality of design, made before Whall rediscovered the methods of mediaeval glass-workers, he had read Saint Chrysostom, Ibsen, Swift, because they made abstinence easy by making life hateful in his eyes. He drank little, ate enormously, but thought himself an ascetic because he had but one meal a day, and suffered, though a courteous man, from a subconscious hatred of women. His father had been extravagantly amorous; I was later to collect folk-lore from one of his father's peasant mistresses, then an old woman. I have heard of his getting from his horse to chase a girl for a kiss. Edward's mother, who still lived, and is a frail, pinched figure in my memory, had tried to marry him to women who did not share or even understand his tastes and were perhaps chosen for that reason. Edward, who admired Beardsley for his saturnine genius, had commissioned from him a great stained-glass window for the hall. And had Beardsley lived another year, his fat women, his effeminate men, his children drawn so as to suggest the foetus, would have fed Edward's hatred of life. I can remember his mother's current selection, a pretty somewhat ruddy girl, saying: 'I never could stand those Beardsleys', fixing her eye on an incomparable Utamaro. The drawing-room furniture

was vulgar and pretentious, because he thought himself bound to satisfy what he believed to be the taste of women. Only his monklike bedroom, built over the stables and opening into the tower on the opposite side to the house, his study in the tower, and the pictures, showed his own improving taste. His first purchase, a large coffee-coloured sea picture by Edwin Ellis---not my friend the Blake scholar, but the Academician---had been a mistake; then, perhaps under the influence of George Moore, a relative on his father's side, came Degas, Monet, Corot, Utamaro, and of these pictures he talked with more intelligence, more feeling than when he talked of literature. His Degas showed the strongly marked shoulder-blades of a dancing-girl, robbing her of voluptuous charm. Degas had said to him: 'Cynicism is the only sublimity'. It hung somewhere near the Utamaro, which pleased him because of its almost abstract pattern, or because the beautiful women portrayed do not stir our Western senses.

II

When Symons and I paid our visit, Martyn had just finished The Heather Field. Alexander had praised it and refused it, and he talked of having it produced in Germany. He sat down daily to some task, perhaps Maeve, but I was certain even then, I think, that though he would find subjects, construct plots, he would never learn to write; his mind was a fleshless skeleton. I used to think that two traditions met and destroyed each other in his blood, creating the sterility of a mule. His father's family was old and honoured; his mother but one generation from the peasant. Her father, an estate steward, earned money in some way that I have forgotten. His religion was a peasant religion; he knew nothing of those interpretations, casuistries, whereby my Catholic acquaintance adapt their ancient rules to

modern necessities. What drove him to those long prayers, those long meditations, that stern Church music? What secret torture?

III

Presently, perhaps after Arthur Symons had gone, Lady Gregory called, reminded me that we had met in London though but for a few minutes at some fashionable house. A glimpse of a long vista of trees, over an undergrowth of clipped laurels, seen for a moment as the outside car approached her house on my first visit, is a vivid memory. Coole House, though it has lost the great park full of ancient trees, is still set in the midst of a thick wood, which spreads out behind the house in two directions, in one along the edges of a lake which, as there is no escape for its water except a narrow subterranean passage, doubles or trebles its size in winter. In later years I was to know the edges of that lake better than any spot on earth, to know it in all the changes of the seasons, to find there always some new beauty. Wondering at myself, I remember that when I first saw that house I was so full of the mediaevalism of William Morris that I did not like the gold frames, some deep and full of ornament, round the pictures in the drawing-room; years were to pass before I came to understand the earlier nineteenth and later eighteenth century, and to love that house more than all other houses. Every generation had left its memorial; every generation had been highly educated; eldest sons had gone the grand tour, returning with statues or pictures; Mogul or Persian paintings had been brought from the Far East by a Gregory chairman of the East India Company, great earthenware ewers and basins, great silver bowls, by Lady Gregory's husband, a famous Governor of Ceylon, who had married in old age, and was now some seven years dead; but of all those Gregorys, the least distinguished, judged by accepted standards, most roused my interest--- a

Richard who at the close of the eighteenth century was a popular brilliant officer in the Guards. He was accused of pleading ill-health to escape active service, and though exonerated by some official inquiry, resigned his commission, gave up London and his friends. He made the acquaintance of a schoolgirl, carried her off, put her into a little house in Coole demesne, afterwards the steward's house, where she lived disguised as a boy until his father died. They married, and at the end of last century the people still kept the memory of her kindness and her charity. One of the latest planted of the woods bore her name, and is, I hope, still called, now that the Government Foresters are in possession, 'The Isabella Wood'. While compelled to live in boy's clothes she had called herself 'Jack the Sailor' from a song of Dibdin's. Richard had brought in bullock-carts through Italy the marble copy of the Venus de' Medici in the drawing-room, added to the library the Greek and Roman Classics bound by famous French and English binders, substituted for the old straight avenue two great sweeping avenues each a mile or a little more in length. Was it he or his father who had possessed the Arab horses, painted by Stubbs? It was perhaps Lady Gregory's husband, a Trustee of the English National Gallery, who had bought the greater number of the pictures. Those that I keep most in memory are a Canaletto, a Guardi, a Zurbaran. Two or three that once hung there had, before I saw those great rooms, gone to the National Gallery, and the fine portraits by Augustus John and Charles Shannon were still to come. The mezzotints and engravings of the masters and friends of the old Gregorys that hung round the small downstairs breakfast-room, Pitt, Fox, Lord Wellesley, Palmerston, Gladstone, many that I have forgotten, had increased generation by generation, and amongst them Lady Gregory had hung a letter from Burke to the Gregory that was chairman of the East India Company saying that he committed to his care, now that he himself had grown old, the people of

India. In the hall, or at one's right hand as one ascended the stairs, hung Persian helmets, Indian shields, Indian swords in elaborate sheaths, stuffed birds from various parts of the world, shot by whom nobody could remember, portraits of the members of Grillion's Club, illuminated addresses presented in Ceylon or Galway, signed photographs or engravings of Tennyson, Mark Twain, Browning, Thackeray, at a later date paintings of Galway scenery by Sir Richard Burton, bequeathed at his death, and etchings by Augustus John. I can remember somebody saying: 'Balzac would have given twenty pages to the stairs'. The house itself was plain and box-like, except on the side towards the lake, where somebody, probably Richard Gregory, had enlarged the drawing-room and dining-room with great bow windows. Edward Martyn's burnt house had been like it doubtless, for it was into such houses men moved, when it was safe to leave their castles, or the thatched cottages under castle walls; architecture did not return until the cut stone Georgian houses of a later date.

IV

Lady Gregory, as I first knew her, was a plainly dressed woman of forty-five, without obvious good looks, except the charm that comes from strength, intelligence and kindness. One who knew her at an earlier date speaks of dark skin, of an extreme vitality, and a portrait by Mrs. Jopling that may have flattered shows considerable beauty. When her husband died, she had given up her London house, had devoted herself to the estate and to her son, spending little that mortgages might be paid off. The house had become her passion. That passion grew greater still when the house took its place in the public life of Ireland. She was a type that only the superficial observer could identify with Victorian earnestness, for her point of view was founded, not on any narrow modern habit, but upon her sense of great

literature, upon her own strange feudal, almost mediaeval youth. She was a Persse---a form of the name Shakespeare calls Percy — descended from some Duke of Northumberland; her family had settled in the seventeenth century somewhere in the midlands, but finding, the legend declares, the visits of Lord Clanricarde, going and returning between his estate and Dublin, expensive, they had moved that they might be no longer near the high road and bought vast tracts of Galway land. Roxborough House, small and plain, but interesting for its high- pitched roof---the first slate roof built in Galway---was beside the road from Gort to Loughrea, a few yards from the bounding wall of a demesne that was nine miles round. Three or four masons were, during Lady Gregory's girlhood, continually busy upon the wall. On the other side of the road rose the Slievoughter range, feeding grouse and wild deer. The house contained neither pictures nor furniture of historic interest. The Persses had been soldiers, farmers, riders to hounds and, in the time of the Irish Parliament, politicians; a bridge within the wall commemorated the victory of the Irish Volunteers in 1782, but all had lacked intellectual curiosity until the downfall of their class had all but come. In the latter half of the nineteenth century Lady Gregory was born, an older and a younger sister gave birth to Sir Hugh Lane and to that John Shawe-Taylor who, by an act of daring I must presently describe, made the settlement of the Land Question possible.

Popular legend attributes to all the sons of the house daring and physical strength; some years ago, Free State Ministers were fond of recounting the adventures of Lady Gregory's 'Seven Brothers', who, no matter who objected to their rents, or coveted their possessions, were safe 'because had one been killed, the others would have run down and shot the assassin'; how the wildest of the brothers, excluded by some misdemeanour from a Hunt Ball, had turned a hose on the guests; how, a famous shot, he had

walked into a public-house in a time of disturbance and put a bullet through every number on the clock. They had all the necessities of life on the mountain, or within the walls of their demesne, exporting great quantities of game, ruling their tenants, as had their fathers before, with a despotic benevolence, were admired, and perhaps loved, for the Irish people, however lawless, respect a rule founded upon some visible supremacy. I heard an old man say once to Lady Gregory: 'There was never a man that could hold a bow with your brothers'. Those brothers were figures from the eighteenth century. Sir Jonah Barrington might have celebrated their lives, but their mother and the mother of John Shawe-Taylor were of the nineteenth in one of their characteristics. Like so many Irish women of the upper classes, who reacted against the licence, the religious lassitude of the immediate past, they were evangelical Protestants, and set out to convert their neighbourhood. Few remember how much of this movement was a genuine enthusiasm; that one of its missionaries who travelled Ireland has written her life, has described meetings in peasant cottages where everybody engaged in religious discussion, has said that she was everywhere opposed and slandered by the powerful and the wealthy because upon the side of the poor. I can turn from the pages of her book with sympathy. Were I a better man and a more ignorant I had liked just such a life. But that missionary would have met with no sympathy at Roxborough, except, it may be, amongst those boisterous brothers or from one studious girl, for Roxborough Protestantism was on the side of wealth and power. All there had an instinctive love for their country or their neighbourhood, the mail-boat had not yet drawn the thoughts of the wealthy classes elsewhere. My great-grandmother Corbet, the mistress of Sandymount Castle, had been out of Ireland but once. She had visited her son, afterwards Governor of Penang, at his English school, carrying a

fortnight's provisions, so great were the hazards of the crossing; but that was some two generations earlier. Their proselytism expressed their love, they gave what they thought best. But the born student of the great literature of the world cannot proselytize, and Augusta Persse, as Lady Gregory was then named, walked and discussed Shakespeare with a man but little steadier than her brothers, a scholar of Trinity, in later years a famous botanist, a friendship ended by her alarmed mother. Was it earlier or later that she established a little shop upon the estate and herself sold there that she might compel the shopkeepers to bring down their exorbitant prices? Other well-born women of that time, Ruskin's Rose amongst them, did the same. Born in 1852, she had passed her formative years in comparative peace, Fenianism a far-off threat; and her marriage with Sir William Gregory in her twenty-ninth year, visits to Ceylon, India, London, Rome, set her beyond the reach of the bitter struggle between landlord and tenant of the late 'seventies and early's eighties. She knew Ireland always in its permanent relationships, associations ---violence but a brief interruption---, never lost her sense of feudal responsibility, not of duty as the word is generally understood, but of burdens laid upon her by her station and her character, a choice constantly renewed in solitude. 'She has been', said an old man to me, 'like a serving-maid among us. She is plain and simple, like the Mother of God, and that was the greatest lady that ever lived.' When in later years her literary style became in my ears the best written by woman, she had made the people a part of her soul; a phrase of Aristotle's had become her motto: 'To think like a wise man, but to express oneself like the common people'.

V

When I went to Coole the curtain had fallen upon the first act of my drama. In 1891 I had founded in London the Irish Literary Society, joined by most London journalists of Irish birth, a couple of years later in Dublin, the National Literary Society; these societies had given, as I intended, opportunity to a new generation of critics and writers to denounce the propagandist verse and prose that had gone by the name of Irish literature, and to substitute for it certain neglected writers: Sir Samuel Ferguson, a writer of ballads dry in their eighteenth-century sincerity; Standish O'Grady, whose History of Ireland retold the Irish heroic tales in romantic Carlylean prose; the Clarence Mangan of the Dark Rosaleen and O}Hussey}s Ode to The Maguire, our one poet raised to the first rank by intensity, and only that in these or perhaps in the second of these poems. No political purpose informed our meetings; no Lord Mayor, no Member of Parliament, was elected to the chair. John O'Leary, the old Fenian, since his return from his Parisian exile more scholar than politician, first president of the National Literary Society, was succeeded by Dr. Douglas Hyde. His famous presidential lecture upon what he called 'The De- Anglicisation of Ireland' led to the foundation of the Gaelic League, which, though not yet the great movement it became, was soon stronger than the movement in English. Irishmen who wrote in the English language were read by the Irish in England, by the general public there, nothing was read in Ireland except newspapers, prayer-books, popular novels; but if Ireland would not read literature it might listen to it, for politics and the Church had created listeners. I wanted a Theatre---I had wanted it for years, but knowing no way of getting money for a start in Ireland, had talked to Florence Farr, that accomplished speaker of verse, less accomplished actress, of some little London hall, where I could produce plays. I first spoke to Lady Gregory of my abandoned plan for an Irish Theatre, if I can call anything so hopeless a

plan, in the grounds of a little country house at Duras, on the sea-coast, where Galway ends and Clare begins. She had brought me to see the only person in Galway, perhaps I should say in Ireland, who was in any real sense her friend. His romantic name is written on the frame of a picture by Stott of Oldham in the Dublin Municipal Gallery: 'Given by A. Gregory and W. R. Gregory'---Lady Gregory's son, at the time of my first visit a boy of seventeen---'in memory of Count Florimond de Basterot'. He was a Catholic, an old man crippled by the sins of his youth, much devoted to his prayers, but an accomplished man of the world. He had flats in Paris and in Rome and divided his year between them and his little Galway house, passing through Dublin as quickly as possible because he thought it 'a shabby England'. Ancestors had fled from the French Revolution, bought a considerable Galway estate long since sold to some other landlord or divided among the tenants. In a few years, seven or eight, he was to speak to Lady Gregory and to myself, and for the first time, of estate and house, to drive us through what had once been park, show where the walls had stood, what had been garden, an aviary in the midst of it, where the avenue had wound, where upon that avenue he, a boy in his teens, and his father's men-servants had thrown a barricade across it and stood with guns in their hands. His father had died in debt, and at that time a creditor could seize a body and prevent its burial until paid. The creditor arrived, but at the sight of armed men fled. De Basterot fulfilled a saying I have heard somewhere: 'Things reveal themselves passing away'. We never saw him again. In five or six weeks, several men and women with old French titles announced upon a black-edged card the death of 'Florimond, Alfred Jacques, Comte de Basterot, Chevalier de l'Ordre du Saint Sepulcre, leur Cousin Germain et Cousin'. In his garden under his friendly eyes, the Irish National Theatre, though not under that name, was born. I may then have used for the first

time the comparison which in later years I turned into a proverb. Except during certain summer months, when they roost in the fields, crows at nightfall return to the vast rookeries round Tulira Castle, whirling, counter-whirling, clamorous; excited, as it seems, by the sublime dance. It was the one unforgettable event of my first visit as of other visits there. And I was accustomed to say to Lady Gregory when it seemed that some play of mine must be first performed outside Ireland, or when it seemed, as it did once or twice, that I myself might find it impossible to live in Ireland: 'The crows of Tulira return to their trees in winter' or 'The crows return at nightfall', meaning that, after my death, my books would be a part of Irish literature. She, however, with her feeling for immediate action, for the present moment, disapproved of my London project. She offered to collect or give the money for the first Irish performances. My Countess Cathleen was ready, and either I or Lady Gregory spoke to Edward Martyn, who gave up a proposed German performance and became enthusiastic. Then came an unexpected difficulty. Dublin had two theatres, the Royal and the Gaiety, that had been granted patents, a system obsolete everywhere else. No performance, except for charity, could be given but at these two theatres; they were booked for the best months of the year by English travelling companies and in the worst months were expensive. We had to change the law, which we did with the assistance of an old friend of Lady Gregory's husband, Lecky the historian, representative in Parliament of Trinity College. The writing of letters, talks in the Lobby of the House of Commons, seemed to take up all our time.

VI

I must have spent the summer of 1897 at Coole. I was involved in a miserable love affair, that had but for one brief interruption absorbed my

thoughts for years past, and would for some years yet. My devotion might as well have been offered to an image in a milliner's window, or to a statue in a museum, but romantic doctrine had reached its extreme development. Dowson was in love with a girl in an Italian restaurant, courted her for two years; at first she was too young, then he too disreputable; she married the waiter and Dowson's life went to wreck. Sober, he looked on no woman; drunk, he picked the cheapest whore. 'He did not even want them clean', said a friend. 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion.' My health was giving way, my nerves had been wrecked. Finding that I could not work, and thinking the open air salutary, Lady Gregory brought me from cottage to cottage collecting folk-lore. Every night she wrote out what we had heard in the dialect of the cottages. She wrote, if my memory does not deceive me, two hundred thousand words, discovering that vivid English she was the first to use upon the stage. My object was to find actual experience of the supernatural, for I did not believe, nor do I now, that it is possible to discover in the textbooks of the schools, in the manuals sold by religious booksellers, even in the subtle reverie of saints, the most violent force in history. I have described elsewhere our discovery that when we passed the door of some peasant's cottage, we passed out of Europe as that word is understood. 'I have longed', she said once, 'to turn Catholic, that I might be nearer to the people, but you have taught me that paganism brings me nearer still.' Yet neither she nor those peasants were pagans. Christianity begins to recognize the validity of experiences that preceded its birth and were, in some sense, shared by its founders. When later she asked me to annotate and introduce her book, Visions and Beliefs, I began a study of 'Spiritualism' not only in its scientific form but as it is found among the London poor, and discovered that there was little difference except that the experience of the cottagers was the richer. Requiring no proof that we

survive the grave, they could turn to what was dramatic or exciting and, though more ignorant than the townsmen, lacked vulgarity. Do the cottagers still live that mysterious life? Has it been driven away by exciting tales of ambush and assassination or has it become more inaccessible? When I was yet a very young man Sligo people told me whatever I asked, because all knew my mother's father, and some still remembered my father's grandfather. The people of South Galway did the same because Lady Gregory was my friend; an old witchdoctor in Clare said to us both: 'I have told you now what I have not told my own wife'; but if a stranger, or a neighbour that might mock, questioned them, they would say that all such things had long disappeared through the influence of the school. Once when I heard an old shepherd at Doneraile, where I spent a few days, give Lord Castletown such an answer, I said: 'Has anybody ever gone from here to consult Biddy Early?'--- a famous Clare witch---and in a moment the man's face became excited; he himself had stood at the roadside, watching spirits playing hurley in a field, until one came and pulled the cap over his eyes. What he saw, what he did not see but thought he saw, does not concern me here, being but a part of that traditional experience which I have discussed only too much elsewhere. That experience is my obsession, as Coole and its history, her hope that her son or her grandson might live there, were Lady Gregory's.

VII

It was now that George Moore came into our affairs, brought by Edward Martyn, who invited him to find a cast for The Heather Field. They were cousins and inseparable friends, bound one to the other by mutual contempt. When I told Martyn that Moore had good points, he replied: 'I know Moore a great deal longer than you do. He has no good points.' And a week or two

later Moore said: ‘That man Martyn is the most selfish man alive. He thinks that I am damned and he doesn’t care.’ I have described their friendship in a little play called The Cat and the Moon; the speaker is a blind beggar-man, and Laban is a townland where Edward Martyn went to chapel:... ‘Did you ever know a holy man but had a wicked man for his comrade and his heart’s darling? There is not a more holy man in the barony than the man who has the big house at Laban, and he goes knocking about the roads day and night with that old lecher from the county of Mayo, and he a woman-hater from the day of his birth. And well you know and all the neighbours know what they talk of by daylight and candlelight. The old lecher does be telling over all the sins he committed, or maybe never committed at all, and the man of Laban does be trying to head him off and quiet him down that he may quit telling them.’ Moore and Martyn were indeed in certain characteristics typical peasants, the peasant sinner, the peasant saint. Moore’s grandfather or great-grandfather had been a convert, but there were Catholic marriages. Catholic families, beaten down by the Penal Laws, despised by Irish Protestants, by the few English Catholics they met, had but little choice as to where they picked their brides; boys, on one side of old family, grew up squireens, half-sirs, peasants who had lost their tradition, gentlemen who had lost theirs. Lady Gregory once told me what marriage coarsened the Moore blood, but I have forgotten.

George Moore had a ceaseless preoccupation with painting and the theatre, within certain limits a technical understanding of both; whatever idea possessed him, courage and explosive power; but sacrificed all that seemed to other men good breeding, honour, friendship, in pursuit of what he considered the root facts of life. I had seen him once in the Cheshire Cheese. I had with me some proof-sheets of the Ellis and Yeats study of Blake’s philosophy, and the drooping tree on the second page of The Book

of Thel stirred him to eloquence. His ‘How beautiful, how beautiful’ is all I can remember. Then one evening, in a narrow empty street between Fleet Street and the river, I heard a voice resounding as if in a funnel, someone in a hansom cab was denouncing its driver, and Moore drove by. Then I met him in Arthur Symons’ flat in the Temple. He threw himself into a chair with the remark: ‘I wish that woman would wash’. He had just returned from an assignation with his mistress, a woman known to Symons personally, to me by repute, an accomplished, witty, somewhat fashionable woman. All his friends suffered in some way; good behaviour was no protection, for it was all chance whether the facts he pursued were in actual life or in some story that amused him. Had ‘that woman’ prided herself upon her cleanliness, he would, had he decided upon a quarrel, have said with greater publicity: ‘I wish that woman would wash’. His pursuit had now and then unfortunate results. ‘What has depressed you, Moore?’ said an acquaintance. ‘I have been paying attention to a certain woman. I had every reason to think she liked me. I came to the point to-day and was turned down completely.”You must have said something wrong.”No, what I said was all right.”What was it?”I said I was clean and healthy and she could not do better.’ Upon occasion it made him brutal and witty. He and I went to the town of Galway for a Gaelic festival that coincided with some assembly of priests. When we lunched at the Railway Hotel the room was full of priests. A Father Moloney, supposed to know all about Greek Art, caught sight of Moore and introduced himself. He probably knew nothing about Moore, except that he was some kind of critic, for he set out upon his favourite topic with: ‘I have always considered it a proof of Greek purity that though they left the male form uncovered, they invariably draped the female’. ‘Do you consider, Father Moloney,’ said Moore in a voice that rang through the whole room, ‘that the female form is inherently more indecent

than the male?' Every priest turned a stern and horrified eye upon Father Moloney, who sat hunched up and quivering.

I have twice known Moore alarmed and conscience-struck, when told that he had injured somebody's financial prospects--- a financial prospect is a root fact---but he attacked with indifference so long as nothing suffered but his victim's dignity or feelings. To injure a famous scholar in a quarrel not his he had printed all the scandalous stories he could rake together, or invent, in a frenzy of political hatred. I had remonstrated in vain, except that he cut out a passage describing his victim as 'a long pink pig', yet when he thought he might have deprived that scholar of a post he was miserable.

He had gone to Paris straight from his father's racing stables, from a house where there was no culture, as Symons and I understood that word, acquired copious inaccurate French, sat among art students, young writers about to become famous, in some cafee; a man carved out of a turnip, looking out of astonished eyes. I see him as that circle saw him, for I have in memory Manet's caricature. He spoke badly and much in a foreign tongue, read nothing, and was never to attain the discipline of style. 'I wrote a play in French,' he said, 'before I had seen dialogue on paper.' I doubt if he had read a play of Shakespeare's even at the end of his life. He did not know that style existed until he returned to Ireland in middle life; what he learned, he learned from conversation, from acted plays, from pictures. A revolutionary in revolt against the ignorant Catholicism of Mayo, he chose for master Zola as another might have chosen Karl Marx. Even to conversation and acted plays, he gave an inattentive ear, instincts incapable of clear expression deafened him and blinded him; he was Milton's lion rising up, pawing out of the earth, but, unlike that lion, stuck half-way. He reached to middle life ignorant even of small practical details. He said to a friend: 'How do you keep your pants from falling about your knees?"O',

said the friend, ‘I put my braces through the little tapes that are sewn there for the purpose.’ A few days later, he thanked the friend with emotion. Upon a long country bicycle ride with another friend, he had stopped because his pants were about his knees, had gone behind a hedge, had taken them off, and exchanged them at a cottage for a tumbler of milk. Only at pictures did he look undeafened and unblinded, for they impose their silence upon us. His Modern Painting has colloquial animation and surprise that might have grown into a roundness and ripeness of speech that is a part of style had not ambition made him in later life prefer sentences a Dublin critic has compared to ribbons of tooth-paste squeezed out of a tube. When the Irish Theatre was founded, he had published A Mummefs Wife, which had made a considerable sensation, for it was the first realistic novel in the language, the first novel where every incident was there not because the author thought it beautiful, exciting or amusing, but because certain people who were neither beautiful, exciting, nor amusing must have acted in that way: the root facts of life, as they are known to the greatest number of people, that and nothing else. Balzac would have added his wisdom. Moore had but his blind ambition. Esther Waters should have been a greater novel, for the scene is more varied. Esther is tempted to steal a half-crown; Balzac might have made her steal it and keep our sympathy, but Moore must create a personification of motherly goodness, almost an abstraction. Five years later he begged a number of his friends to read it. ‘I have just read it’, he said. ‘It has done me good, it radiates goodness.’ He had wanted to be good as the mass of men understand goodness. In later life he wrote a long preface to prove that he had a mistress in Mayfair.

VIII

I knew nothing of Moore at the time I write of except what Symons or Martyn told me, or I had learnt from his occasional articles. I had read no book of his, nor would I, had he not insisted, for my sympathies were narrow. I cared for nothing but poetry or prose that shared its intensity. Florence Farr and I had just begun that attempt described in Speaking to the Psaltery to revive the ancient art of minstrelsy. Florence Farr had ruined her career by premature success. For ten years she had played a series of parts, which had through their association with controversial movements attained great publicity. I remember most vividly her performance in Arms and the Man and in Rosmersholm, but most of all her first success in Dr. Todhunter's Sicilian Idyll. Because she could not accept less than twenty pounds a week without loss of status and got it but rarely, she was doomed to remain an amateur. Yet her voice was among the most beautiful of her time, her elocution, her mastery of poetical rhythm incomparable.

IX

To remind myself of these and other events I have been looking through the letters I wrote to Lady Gregory during those first years of our friendship. She was now at Coole, now at Queen Anne's Mansions, now in Paris, I at 18 Woburn Buildings, London, or with an uncle at Sligo. On the ground floor at Woburn Buildings lived a shoemaker; on the first floor a workman and his family; I on the second floor; in the attic an old pedlar, who painted a little in water-colours. I wrote in one of the earliest letters: 'I have measured the window' (Lady Gregory must have given me the great blue curtain that was a principal feature there for twenty years). 'Ought I to let you do all these kind things for me?... I have reasoned myself out of the instincts and rules by which one mostly surrounds oneself. I have nothing but reason to trust to, and so am in continual doubt about simple things.'

Presently she gave me a great leather arm-chair which is before my eyes at this moment. From her came the great collection of folklore that, turned into essays for the monthly reviews, brought ten or fifteen pounds at a time. Then one night when she and the other guests had gone I found twenty pounds behind my clock. I went to see her and tried to return it. 'You must take this money', she said. 'You should give up journalism. The only wrong act that matters is not doing one's best work.' She had that test for everyone. We were all like packets of herbs, each with its special quality. From time to time from that on she gave me money. I was not to consider it a loan, though I might return it some day if well off. When I finished my first lecture tour in the United States, the winter of 1903-04, I tried to return it, but she said: 'Not until I think you have enough money to feel independent'. I inherited a little money from a relative, but she still refused. Four or five years later she consented. I asked how much; she said, 'Five hundred'. It was a shock to find I owed so much. I wrote to an American lecture agent, earned the money and paid it back. That I am ashamed of that long debt to so dear a friend, that I have told it after a struggle with myself, puts me to shame. Of still greater service were those summers at Coole. For twenty years I spent two or three months there in every year. Because of those summers, because of that money, I was able through the greater part of my working life to write without thought of anything but the beauty or the utility of what I wrote. Until I was nearly fifty, my writing never brought me more than two hundred a year, and most often less, and I am not by nature economical.

I wrote from Sligo of my uncle George Pollexfen (I have described him in The Trembling of the Veil): 'He is just at this moment in one of his bad fits owing to the fact that the inhabitants attack him as they cannot get at me. He brought me to a Masonic concert on Thursday. Somebody sang a

stage Irishman's song---the usual whiskey, shillelagh kind of thing---and I hissed him, and lest my hiss might be lost in the general applause, waited until the applause had died down and hissed again. That gave somebody also courage, and we both hissed. My uncle defends me, but says that he makes a poor hand of it and gets beaten.'

Then I wrote about 'A great battle with George Armstrong' (Professor of Literature at Cork; author of a trilogy, Saul, David, Solomon). 'He lectured on The Two Irelands, or Ireland in Literature, and his whole lecture was an attack on the "Celtic Movement", full of insinuations about conspiracies to prevent his success as a poet, to keep him out of anthologies, etc. I replied with a great deal of fierceness, described the barrenness of the so-called intellect of Ireland, told him that all the cleverest of the young men were leaving him and coming to us. I then attacked his scholarship and showed that his knowledge of Irish things was of the most obsolete kind. I believe I was unanswerable. At any rate Armstrong made no attempt to reply, but excused himself because of the lateness of the hour, which was weak as he had brought the contest upon himself, and made the hour late by speaking for two hours. Father Barry, who was in the chair, said afterwards: "Thank you for your speech. I agree with almost every word of it." I was glad of this, as it was probably the fiercest the Society had ever heard.'

Then I told how I had taken the chair at some public meeting in London where speakers talked open sedition: 'A principal speaker was the Vicar of Plumpton, who advised everybody to buy a breechloader and prepare for the day of battle and wound up by singing a patriotic song, apparently of his own making.... I was in such a rage that I forgot to put the Resolutions.' Then I described old Cipriani, who spoke as though he stood 'on a battlefield, and he has stood on fifty'. A magnificent-looking old man, a friend of Garibaldi, he had gone all over the world fighting for liberty, and

Maud Gonne had brought him to Ireland to work out a scheme for insurrection, then to some London Irish to make his report. In one letter I used a phrase Lady Gregory was often to chaff me about, though never to repudiate: ‘In a battle like Ireland’s, which is one of poverty against wealth, we must prove our sincerity by making ourselves unpopular to wealth. We must accept the baptism of the gutter. Have not all the leaders done that?’

Then an adventure: ‘Yesterday I was in a tea-shop’, I wrote from London, ‘when a woman with an obvious look of the country introduced herself to me as a Gaelic Leaguer, and straightway introduced me to two friends, a man and a woman who had an equally country look. They told me with wonderful brogues that they were on their way to the Paris Exhibition, and wanted to shake hands with me. They had a great deal to say about the Movement and talked very fast for fear I might go before they had said it. What they said was chiefly about a play in Irish to be acted in Macroom next Monday. It is by one Father Peter O’Leary, and is about a man who lived in Macroom and arranged his own funeral to escape the bailiff. There was immense local enthusiasm over it, and deep indignation among the descendants of the bailiff.’

There is an allusion to the Cabbalistic Society, which had taught me methods of meditation that had greatly affected my thought. A talented girl I had tried to find work for had after years of victorious prudery become the mistress of a drunken scoundrel, and advertised the fact everywhere, even pouring out tea with his arm round her waist. ‘Because she has enough genius’, I wrote, ‘to make her thirst for reality, and not enough intellect to understand the temporal use of unreal things, she is throwing off every remnant of respectability.’ Presently, from excitability, shock, bewilderment at her private circle, which had no objection to lovers but much to that particular lover, her health broke down. Then the Cabbalistic Society took

her affairs in hand, a rich member had ‘collected all her unpaid bills... another mystic sees her to-day and will give her whatever help may be wanted. These mystics will not bemoralize her, which her other friends have been doing, especially Lady ---.’ (She had denounced the crime of picking the wrong man. Her own entanglement was notorious but exalted.) ‘For their faith makes them look on everything in the world as so wrong that the conventional errors seem to them trivial, and all defiance meritorious. They keep their morality for each other, and are firmly divided just now into the compassionate who lack idealism, and the idealists who lack compassion--- Moore’s “Idle Devout”; and --- has been handed over to the compassionate, to the joy of the “Idle Devout” who are anxious to be forgotten by their enemies.’ A year or two later I was to describe her crying over Wilde’s death: ‘“He was so kind, nobody ever lived who was so kind”. As she said it I thought of Homer’s description of the captive women: “Weeping in seeming for Patroclus, yet each weeping for her own sorrow, because he was ever kind”.’ I wrote to Lady Gregory about this girl, because I was certain of her sympathy, yet those who did not know her thought her stern. A beautiful woman, whose love affairs were notorious, once said to me: ‘When I got into the train at Broadstone, there were only two vacant places, one next Lady Gregory and one next the Bishop of Tuam. I thought “I am in for a lecture from somebody” and took the place next the Bishop, and all he said was: “Well, my child, you know a great deal more of the world than when I confirmed you”.’

X

I invited Florence Farr to find players for my Countess Cathleen. I do not remember whether it was Florence Farr or I or Edward Martyn who asked a

Dublin amateur actor to play a principal part in both plays, but it was certainly Edward Martyn who invited George Moore to a rehearsal of The Heather Field. I wrote to Lady Gregory in March or April 1899: ‘Moore first got rid of practically the whole cast’, putting X (the Dublin amateur actor) out of the part of Usher. ‘He ran at the chairs, kicked them and called Moore names, upon which the prompter threatened him with personal violence if he used such language in the presence of ladies.’

Then Moore descended upon my rehearsals. I was relieved, for I was rehearsing in the part of Countess Cathleen a young girl who had made a great success some years before as the Faery Child in my Land of Hearths Desire. She had a beautiful speaking voice but lacked experience. I describe the result: ‘Moore has put a Miss Whitty to act Countess Cathleen. She acts admirably, and has no sense of rhythm whatever.... She enrages me every moment, but will make the part a success. I am getting the others to speak with a little, a very little music. Mrs. Emery (Florence Farr) alone satisfies my ear.’ Perhaps I should have insisted upon the young girl, for after Miss Whitty’s dress rehearsal somebody said: ‘Miss Whitty brought tears into my eyes because she had them in her voice, but that young girl brought them into my eyes with beauty’.

When ‘The Antient Concert Rooms’ had been taken, the rehearsals almost begun, Edward Martyn wrote to Lady Gregory and myself withdrawing financial support. Some monk, I never learned the name, had called The Countess Cathleen heretical. She sells her soul to certain demons for money that the people may not be compelled by starvation to sell theirs. She dies. The demons had deceived themselves, had trusted to bond and signature, but God sees ‘the motive, not the deed’. My error was doubly dangerous, for I had put the thought into the mouth of an angel. A political

enemy wrote a pamphlet against the play, quoting the opinions of the demons as if they were the author's, sold it in the shops, in the streets, dropped copies into every doctor's letter-box, but Edward Martyn was not disturbed. No popular agitation disturbed him. Somebody had read or shown the pamphlet to old Cardinal Logue, and he had written to the newspapers that if the play was as represented, no Catholic should go to it. And that, too, did not disturb him, because Cardinal Logue had not seen the play. Lady Gregory and I thought that two ecclesiastics might be got to outvote one; Martyn agreed to accept the verdict, and Lady Gregory made Moore promise silence for a fortnight. I have lost Father Finlay's letter, it approved the play, but I have Father Barry's. He was the author of The New Antigone, a famous book in those days, and what is more, a learned, accomplished man. 'From the literal point of view', he wrote, 'theologians, Catholic or other, could object that no one is free to sell his soul in order to buy bread even for the starving, but Saint Paul says: "I wish to be anathema for my people", which is another way for expressing what you have put into the story. I would give the play and the explanation afterwards.' Edward Martyn was quite content, but not Moore. 'Martyn', I wrote to Lady Gregory, 'is in excellent spirits, but says that if any person in authority were to speak, he would withdraw again.' (The votes would be equal.) Moore, upon the other hand, lamented his lost row. He had meant to write an article called 'Edward Martyn and his Soul'. He said: 'It was the best opportunity I ever had. What a sensation it would have made!

Nobody has ever written that way about his most intimate friend. What a chance! It would have been heard of everywhere.' As Florence Farr and I sat at breakfast in a Dublin hotel, having just arrived by the mail-boat to make some final arrangements, Martyn came wiping the perspiration from his face in great excitement. His first sentence was: 'I withdraw again'. He

had just received by post ‘Edward Martyn and his Soul’ in the form of a letter. We comforted him all we could, and before twelve o’clock all was well. Before the first performance, to the charge of heresy was added that of representing Irish men and women as selling their souls, whereas ‘their refusal to change their religion, even when starving, proved that they would not’. On the night of the performance, there was a friendly house drawn from the general public, but many interrupters in the gallery. I had asked for police protection and found twenty or thirty police awaiting my arrival. A sergeant explained that they could not act unless called upon. I turned to a friend, once Secretary to the Land League, and said: ‘Stay with me, I have no experience’. All the police smiled, and I remembered a lying rumour that I had organized the Jubilee riots; people had even told each other what sum I paid for every rioter. The selling of the souls; the lines---

> The Light of Lights
> Looks always on the motive, not the deed; and
> Sign with this quill.
> It was a feather growing on the cock
> That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
> And all who use it have great honour in Hell;

the last four considered an attack on the Pope, caused disturbances.

Every disturbance was drowned by cheers. Arthur Griffith, afterwards slanderer of Lane and Synge, founder of the Sinn Fein Movement, first President of the Irish Free State, and at that time an enthusiastic anti-cleric, claimed to have brought ‘a lot of men from the Quays and told them to applaud everything the Church would not like’. I did not want my play turned into an anti-clerical demonstration, and decided from the general

feeling of discomfort when an evil peasant in my first act trampled upon a Catholic shrine that the disturbances were in part my own fault. In using what I considered traditional symbols I forgot that in Ireland they are not symbols but realities. But the attacks in the main, like those upon Synge and O'Casey, came from the public ignorance of literary method. The play itself was ill-constructed, the dialogue turning aside at the lure of word or metaphor, very different, I hope, from the play as it is to-day after many alterations, every alteration tested by performance. It was not, nor is it now, more than a piece of tapestry. The Countess sells her soul, but she is not transformed. If I were to think out that scene today, she would, the moment her hand has signed, burst into loud laughter, mock at all she has held holy, horrify the peasants in the midst of their temptations. Nothing satisfied me but Florence Farr's performance in the part of Aleel. Dublin talked of it for years, and after five-and-thirty years I keep among my unforgettable memories the sense of coming disaster she put into the words:

... but now Two grey horned owls hooted above our heads. I telegraphed to Moore: 'Play a success'; he arrived in time for The Heather Field. He says in Ave that Martyn telegraphed: 'The sceptre of intellect has passed from England to Ireland', but that sounds more like Moore than the economical, tongue-tied Martyn, and suggests the state of exaltation he arrived in. The Heather Field was a much greater success than The Countess Cathleen, being in the manner of Ibsen, the manner of the moment. The construction seemed masterly. I tried to believe that a great new dramatist had appeared. Miss Whitty, who in The Countess Cathleen had been effective and commonplace, moving us to tears by the tears in her own voice, was now acrid, powerful, original; an actor who played the hero driven to madness by his too practical wife (Mrs. Martyn's attempts to find

a wife for her son came into my head) was perhaps even better. At the end of the performance, Moore forced his way through the crowded lobby triumphant (I did not know until months afterwards that the masterly construction had been his), and catching sight of a tall friend near the street door shouted: ‘I see by the morning paper that... has provided Lord... with an heir’, thereby starting a scandal that ran for months from village to village, disturbing several circles, private and official.

XI

A couple of years before, it had seemed for a few months that the old political groupings were about to break up, everywhere people had looked forward, expecting, speculating. A Royal Commission, its members drawn from all parties, appointed by a Conservative Government, presided over by Gladstone’s Lord Chancellor, had reported that the over-taxation of Ireland for the last fifty years amounted to some three hundred millions. The Irish Landlord Party, which based its politics upon the conviction that Ireland had gained by the Union, had a revulsion of conscience. Lord Castletown made a famous speech declaring that Ireland must imitate the colonists who flung the tea into Boston Harbour. Landlord committees were appointed in every county. Then Lord Salisbury appointed a second Royal Commission to consider the wrongs of landlords, and not one of those committees met again. There was deep disappointment. Protestant Ireland had immense prestige, Burke, Swift, Grattan, Emmet, Fitzgerald, Parnell, almost every name sung in modern song, had been Protestant; Dublin’s dignity depended upon the gaunt magnificence of buildings founded under the old Parliament; but wherever it attempted some corporate action, wherein Ireland stood against England, the show, however gallant it seemed, was soon over. It sold its Parliament for solid money, and now it sold this cause

for a phantom. Nobody was the better or worse for Lord Salisbury's new Commission. Protestant Ireland could not have done otherwise; it lacked hereditary passion. Parnell, its last great figure, finding that this lack had made the party of my father's old friend Isaac Butt powerless, called in the peasants' tenacity and violence, but for months now the peasants had stood aside and waited, hoping that their old masters might take the leadership again. Standish O'Grady, a man past middle life, was now principal leader-writer of the Daily Express, the most uncompromising of the Dublin Unionist newspapers. He was of landlord stock, based all his hopes for Ireland upon that stock. He resigned his position in despair, bought a provincial newspaper, hoped, having made it a success, to buy up other provincial newspapers till he had all the provincial newspapers in Ireland. They would keep their local news, but all would contain his articles, all would rouse the gentry to their duty. He wrote pamphlets, published a weekly review, the same theme recurring. A famous passage described the downfall and flight of the Catholic aristocracy, lamented by the poor, sung by poets, but their successors, he cried out, would pass unlamented, unsung. In another, fixing his thought upon the poorer gentry, he compared them to the lean hounds that are the best hunters: 'O, lean hounds, when will you begin to hunt?' His plans brought him misfortune. A certain man had, in his opinion, wronged and slandered a county family. He denounced him, and because the county took no notice wrote lofty essays upon its lack of public spirit. He wrote for his equals, wrote as Grattan spoke, not for the mob that he scorned. Hearing a great noise under his window, he looked out; men were marching to take ship for South Africa, cheering for Kruger, at their head the man he had denounced. His words had destroyed that man's influence among those O'Grady scorned without affecting it anywhere else. He lost his head and in fierce melancholy wrote that he no longer

condemned ‘the poor wretch himself, but the three bad men who supported him’, naming the Master of the Foxhounds, the Bishop and the principal nobleman of that district. After that an action for libel and financial disaster. The Bishop---or was it the Master of Foxhounds?---never heard of the essays, never knew that there was a charge against ‘the poor wretch himself’, and as O’Grady was unable to prove the contrary, friends arranged for his apology and mitigated his bankruptcy. All that, however, was yet to come.

Horace Plunkett had bought the Daily Express. Under T. P. Gill, an ex-Parnellite Member and London journalist, it expounded Plunkett’s agricultural policy, avoiding all that might excite passion. Gill had spent his life manipulating incompatibles; at the Parnellite split he took neither side. I think of him as making toy houses with little bits of pasteboard, gummed together with stamp-paper. ‘So-and-so is flat-footed’, he would say, characterizing some person whose heavy step might shake the table, and the flat-footed abounded at the moment. The relations of England and France were disturbed, a French officer, batoned in the Dublin streets, reported to the French War Office that Ireland was ready for insurrection. Maud Gonne had persuaded that Office to take from a pigeon-hole a scheme for an invasion of Ireland. A man I met in Sligo dreamed that he was entrenched in a swamp, fighting against invaders. ‘What will you do’, somebody asked the Express Editor, ‘if the French land at Killala?”I will write the best article of my life’, was the answer. ‘I will call upon my readers to remember their great traditions, to remember their own ancestors, to make up their minds with the utmost resolution, without a moment’s hesitation, which side they are going to take.’

The Daily Express was almost as unsuccessful financially as Standish O’Grady’s paper. When it wrote of a Protestant and of a Catholic

Archbishop, old subscribers withdrew because the first, being the only true Archbishop, required no prefix. New subscribers bought little but the Friday number, which reviewed books, avoided contemporary politics, but contained articles that made people say: ‘Something is going to happen’. In its correspondence column, controversies were fought out that are still remembered.

Then Horace Plunkett told Gill to give a public dinner to Edward Martyn and myself. I do not remember who took the chair, or the names of more than half a dozen of the guests. Moore has described it in Ave, but our memories differ. I doubt even his first sentence: ‘Not an opera hat amongst them, and no one should be seen without one... perhaps they have not even changed their socks’. He was thinking of taking up politics, wanted to go into Parliament as an Irish patriot, had suggested, with that ingenuous way of his, that I should do the same, he would even accept me as his leader, and when I would not, wrote---or did that come later?--- to John Redmond, then in control of the reunited Party, and offered himself as a candidate. He came to the dinner carrying in his hand the only political speech he was ever to deliver, an attack on William O’Brien, then about to return to public life at the head of his Mayo peasants. A little before he stood up, J. F. Taylor came, late for the dinner, but in time for his main interest, the speeches. He was Moore’s opposite, a great orator, the greatest I have heard, doomed by the violence of his temper to speak before Law Students’ Debating Societies, obscure Young Ireland Societies, Workmen’s Clubs. His body was angular, often rigid with suppressed rage, his gaze fixed upon some object, his clothes badly made, his erect attitude suggesting a firm base. Moore’s body was insinuating, upflowing, circulative, curvicular, pop-eyed. What brought Taylor, I do not know. He hated me, partly because his mind, trained in Catholic schools, where formal logic had importance, was dry and abstract,

except in the great flights of his rhetoric, mine romantic, but mainly because jealous of my influence with the old Fenian John O'Leary. O'Leary used to say: 'I have three followers---Taylor, Yeats, and Rolleston'. But now that Rolleston had taken office under the Crown, he had but Taylor and me. He came perhaps because The Heather Field}s lack of sensuous form, or its logical structure, attracted him. Moore seemed timid, and was certainly all but inaudible. Taylor alone seemed to listen, but he listened stiffening. William O'Brien was his special private butt, he had denounced him for ten years as the type of an unscrupulous, reckless demagogue. How dared anybody touch his pheasant, his partridge, his snipe? What Moore said, I do not remember. I remember Taylor, though lacking the crowd of young men, the instrument on which he had learned to play, he was not at his best. 'When William O'Brien was making the sacrifice of Mr. Yeats' Countess Cathleen, damning his soul for his country, where was Mr. Moore? In London, in Paris?' Thereon he described Moore's life, in phrases that were perhaps influenced by Carlyle's description at the opening of his French Revolution, of the 'Scarlet Woman' Dubarry. Moore has written that I tried to make him answer, but I was at the other side of the table, and had learnt from defeats of my own not to rouse that formidable man. Moore with Esther Waters and A Mummefs Wife to his account, one or other in the mind of every man there, had no need to answer. Towards the end of the evening, when everybody was more or less drunk, O'Grady spoke. He was very drunk, but neither his voice nor his manner showed it. I had never heard him speak, and at first he reminded me of Cardinal Manning. There was the same simplicity, the same gentleness. He stood between two tables, touching one or the other for support, and said in a low penetrating voice: 'We have now a literary movement, it is not very important; it will be followed by a political movement, that will not be very important; then

must come a military movement, that will be important indeed'. Tyrrell, Professor of Greek in Trinity College, known to scholars for his share in the Tyrrell-Purser edition of Cicero's Letters, a Unionist, but very drunk, led the applause. Then O'Grady described the Boy Scout Act, which had just passed, urged the landlords of Ireland to avail themselves of that Act and drill the sons of their tenants---'paying but little attention to the age limit'---then, pointing to where he supposed England to be, they must bid them 'march to the conquest of that decadent nation'. I knew what was in his mind. England was decadent because, democratic and so without fixed principles, it had used Irish landlords, his own ancestors or living relatives, as its garrison, and later left them deserted among their enemies. Tyrrell, understanding nothing but the sweetness of that voice, the nobility of that gesture, continued to lead the applause. Moore for all his toil had never style. Taylor had it in flights of oratorical frenzy, but drunk or sober, idle or toiling, this man had it; their torch smoked, their wine had dregs, his element burned or ran pure. When in later years compelled to answer some bitter personal attack, he showed that alone among our public men he could rise above bitterness, use words that, for all their convincing logic, made his reader murmur:

> Ye do it wrong, being so majestical,
> To offer it the show of violence.

When I try to recall his physical appearance, my father's picture in the Municipal Gallery blots out my own memory. He comes before me with a normal robust body, dim obsessed eyes, upon the wall above his head the title of a forgotten novel: Ye Loste Lande.

XII

The Countess Cathleen and The Heather Field were performed in the week commencing May 8th, 1899, and such was our faith in the author of The Heather Field that, though we had not seen his unfinished play, we engaged the Gaiety Theatre for a week in 1900. His play, understood to be satirical and topical, was to be the main event. Maeve, originally published with The Heather Field, would accompany it, but was, we thought, too poetical, too remote from normal life to draw the crowd. I spent the summer at Coole; George Moore was at Tulira, but on Sunday mornings Edward Martyn's old coachman would drive up by the Gort Avenue, George Moore behind him on the old outside car: Moore had been to Mass. As Moore had been brought up a Catholic, Martyn insisted upon Mass; how they avoided the Ardrahan church and Martyn's company I cannot remember; perhaps Martyn went to early Mass; but Gort suited them both. Moore would listen for a minute, would slip out, meet his coachman at the side door of a public-house which ignored the Act of Parliament for its more valuable customers, find the outside car in some yard. Coole was but two miles off, one mile of road, one mile of demesne under great trees. Devotion to Parnell had made the coachman an anti-cleric. A couple of years later I saw him for the last time, he wanted an introduction to somebody he knew of that lacked a coachman. When Lady Gregory asked about his dismissal he said: 'I think Mr. Martyn thought I must soon die because I am an old man, and that he might see my ghost'. Lady Gregory remembered that Mrs. Martyn had died the year before, that Martyn, whose conscience tortured him because he had opposed her plans, perhaps because he had refused to marry, had seen some sight or heard some sound that terrified him. Sometimes Moore drove over in the afternoon. One afternoon he asked to see me alone. I brought him to the path by the lakeside. He had constructed The Heather Field, he said, telling Martyn what was to go into every speech but writing nothing, had

partly constructed Maeve---I heard only the other day that Arthur Symons had revised the style for a fee, setting it high above Martyn's level---but that Martyn now refused his help. 'He can find subjects', Moore said, 'and I cannot, but he will never write a play alone; I am ready to collaborate all my life and say nothing about it. You must go to Tulira and persuade Martyn.' This was a Moore I had known nothing of; he had certainly kept silent; it was improbable he could do so now that the play was a success, but it did not seem so at the moment. Moore in his moments of self-abnegation was convinced and convincing. I do not remember whether he had brought the new play as Martyn had written it or whether Martyn sent it later, but I know that my interview with Martyn was postponed until Lady Gregory and I had read it. It seemed to us crude throughout, childish in parts, a play to make our movement and ourselves ridiculous. I was now Moore's advocate and, unlike Lady Gregory, unable to see with Martyn's eyes. I went to Tulira and there denounced the play. I seem to remember Moore as anxious and subdued. Later when he described the scene he compared me to Torquemada. Martyn told us to do what we liked with the play. Moore asked for my collaboration as it was a satire upon contemporary Irish politics and of these he knew nothing. I moved from Coole to Tulira. The finished work was Moore's in its construction and characterization, but most of the political epigrams and certain bitter sentences put into the mouth of Deane, a dramatization of Standish O'Grady, were mine. A rhetorical, undramatic second act about the Celtic Movement, which I had begun to outlive, was all Moore's; as convert he was embarrassing, unsubduable, preposterous.

Lady Gregory thought that no man could endure the sight of others altering all that he had done and discussing the alterations within earshot. She was doubtless right, for Martyn suddenly took the play back. If he

could not write his own plays he was no use, he said; but when the position of the theatre was put before him, my determination and Lady Gregory's to refuse his play, his loss of money, for he was to pay for all, if we had only Maeve, he gave way once more. Moore, however, must sign the play; he would not sign with him 'because Moore would put in what he liked.' Moore was unwilling, he thought little could be made of such material; but being for the moment all self-abnegation, agreed, and was soon convinced that he had written a masterpiece.

There were continual quarrels, sometimes because both were woman-mad, Martyn with contempt, sometimes because Moore did not want to go to Mass, once because he had over-slept himself 'on purpose.' Yet Moore was at this time neither anti-clerical nor anti-Catholic. He had written not only Evelyn Innes but Sister Teresa, a sympathetic study of a convent; nor was he ever to lose an understanding of emotions and beliefs remembered from childhood. He did not want to go to Mass, because his flesh was unwilling, as it was a year later when the teacher, engaged to teach him Gaelic, was told that he was out.

He had exhausted his England in A Mummefs Wife and Esther Waters, and had turned to us, seeking his new task with an ungovernable childlike passion. In later years he attributed his distaste for England to his work upon The Bending of the Bough, his name for Martyn's rewritten play, and it is possible that it made him aware of change. Violent and coarse of temper, he was bound to follow his pendulum's utmost swing; hatred of Queen Victoria, admiration of Catholicism, hatred of the English language, love of everything Gaelic, were bound to follow one upon another till he had found his new limit. His relations to men and women ran through like alternations, in his relations to women he touched madness. On a visit to Coole, during some revising of The Bending of the Bough, or to begin

Diarmuid and Grania, its successor, he behaved well till there came a long pause in the conversation one night after dinner. ‘I wonder’, said Moore, ‘why Mrs. --- threw me over; was it because she wanted to marry ---’ --he named a famous woman and a famous peer---’or was it conscience?’ I followed Moore to his room and said, ‘You have broken the understanding?”What understanding?”That your conversation would be fit for Robert.’ Robert, Lady Gregory’s son, was on holiday there from Harrow. ‘The word conscience can have only one meaning.”But it’s true.”There is a social rule that bars such indiscretions.”It has gone out.”Not here.”But it is the only thing I can say about her that she would mind.’ Mrs. --- had been much taken with Moore, I had heard her talk of him all evening, but was of strict morals: I knew from the friend who had listened to Moore’s daily complaints and later to his contradictory inventions, that he had courted her in vain. Two or three years after his Coole transgression, he was accustomed to say: ‘Once she and I were walking in the Green Park. “There is nothing more cruel than lust”, she said. “There is”, I said. “What is that?”

“Vanity”, and I let her go a step or two ahead and gave her a kick behind.’

XIII

On February 19th, The Bending of the Bough and a narrative undramatic play by Alice Milligan, The Last Feast of the Fianna; on February 20th, Maeve, were performed at the Gaiety Theatre. The actors had been collected by Moore in London. Our audiences, which seemed to us very large, did not fill the house, but were enthusiastic; we worked, perhaps I still work, for a small fanatical sect. The Bending of the Bough was badly constructed, had never become a single thought or passion, but was the first

dramatization of an Irish problem. Lady Gregory wrote in her diary: ‘M. is in great enthusiasm over it, says it will cause a revolution’ (whoever M. was he was not Martyn, who hated the play). ‘H. says no young man who sees that play will leave the house as he came into it.... The Gaelic League, in great force, sang “Fainne geal an lae” between the acts, and “The Wearing of the Green” in Irish.... The play hits so impartially all round that no one is really offended.’ Edward Martyn had shaped Peg Inerny, a principal character in Maeve, under the influence of stories gathered by Lady Gregory and myself. She is one of those women who in sleep pass into another state, are ‘away’ as the people say, seem to live among people long dead, in the midst of another civilization. We had thought the play dim and metaphysical, but it did not seem so in performance. Maeve, Lady Gregory wrote, ‘which we did not think a nationalist play at all, has turned out to be one, the audience understanding and applauding the allegory. There is such applause at “I am only an old woman, but I tell you that Erin will never be subdued”, Lady --- reported to the Castle that they had better boycott it, which they have done.’

XIV

I disliked Moore’s now sentimental, now promiscuous amours, the main matter of his talk. A romantic, when romanticism was in its final extravagance, I thought one woman, whether wife, mistress, or incitement to platonic love, enough for a lifetime: a Parsifal, Tristram, Don Quixote, without the intellectual prepossessions that gave them solidity. I disliked almost as much the manner of his talk, I told him that he was more mob than man, always an enthusiastic listener or noisy interrupter. Yet I admired him and found myself his advocate. I wrote to Lady Gregory: ‘He is

constantly so likeable that one can believe no evil of him, and then in a moment a kind of devil takes hold of him, his voice changes, his look changes, and he becomes hateful.... It is so hard not to trust him, yet he is quite untrustworthy. He has what Talleyrand calls “the terrible gift familiarity”. One must look upon him as a mind that can be of service to one’s cause.’ Moore, driven to frenzy by the Boer War, had some project of lecturing in America against an Anglo-American alliance, much talked of at the time. ‘I shall be glad’, I wrote, ‘if he himself goes.’ (I had refused to go with him.) ‘Less because of any harm he may do the Anglo-American alliance than because it will help to make our extremists think about the foundations of life and letters, which they certainly do not at present. To transmute the anti-English passion into a passion of hatred against the vulgarity and materialism whereon England has founded her worst life and the whole life that she sends us, has always been a dream of mine, and Moore may help in that transmutation.’ Moore, accustomed by his journalism to an immediate sensational contact with public opinion, was always urging Lady Gregory and me to do this or do that, that we might be more notorious, more popular. ‘How Moore lives in the present’, I wrote. ‘If the National Theatre is ever started’ (the company of players that was to succeed to the annual dramatic event with English players) ‘what he is and what I am will be weighed, and very little what we have said or done. A phrase more or less matters little.... Yet I suppose we would both be more popular if I could keep from saying what I think, and Moore from saying what he does not think. You may tell him that the wisest of men does not know what is expedient, but that we can all know what is our particular truth, cajolery never lit the fire.’ Yet to friends who complained by letter or word of mouth against my bringing such a man into the movement, I defended him and attacked his enemies. George Russell (A. E.), afterwards

Moore's chief Dublin friend, had complained much, and I wrote---too much aware of what I thought my own quality---'He and I are the opposite of one another. I think I understand people easily, easily sympathise with all kinds of character, easily forgive all kinds of defects. Apart from opinions which I judge too sternly, I scarcely judge people at all, am altogether lax in my attitude towards conduct. He understands nobody but himself, so must be always condemning or worshipping. He is a good judge of right and wrong so long as they can be judged apart from people, so long as they are merely action to be weighed by the moral sense. His moral enthusiasm is an inspiration, but it makes him understand ideas and not human nature. One pays a price for everything.' My advocacy had threatened to disrupt the Irish Literary Society which I had founded and still thought a useful instrument. Early in the year its treasurer, Charles Russell, the famous lawyer, invited Moore to become a member, forgot he had done so, proposed that the Committee should blackball him---there was some anti-Catholic passage in A Drama in Muslin--- and was supported by Barry O'Brien, who could not abide Parnell and his Island. I got rid of Charles Russell by producing his letter of invitation, but Barry O'Brien remained, and after a long fight I withdrew Moore's name and resigned rather than force his resignation. He and I had given the Society what energy it had, keeping it out of the commonplace that was bound to overtake it in the end.

It was Moore's own fault that everybody hated him except a few London painters. In one of Dostoievsky's novels there is a man who proposes that everybody present should tell his worst action. Nobody takes the proposal seriously; everybody is witty or amusing until his turn comes. He confesses that he once stole half- a-crown and left a servant-girl to bear the blame. Moore might have so confessed, but his confession would have been a plagiarism or a whole lie. I met a man who hated Moore because Moore

told some audience that he had selected a Parisian street- boy, for one day dressed him in good clothes, housed him in an expensive hotel, gave him all that he wanted, then put him back into rags and turned him out to discover what would happen: a plagiarism from a well-known French author. 'Yeats,' he said to me once, 'I was sitting here in my room the other night when there was a ring. My servant was out; when I opened the door a woman ran in and threw her arms round my neck. "At last I have found you. There were thirteen George Moores in the London Directory. You're the ninth I have called on. What? Not recollect me---not recollect the woman you raped in Paris twenty years ago?"'She had called about her daughter's musical education, he said. Had I been more sympathetic I would have heard of a new Evelyn Innes. He was jealous of his own Sir Owen Asher. He was all self and yet had so little self that he would destroy his reputation, or that of some friend, to make his audience believe that the story running in his head at the moment had happened, had only just happened.

I saw Moore daily, we were at work on Diarmuid and Grania. Lady Gregory thought such collaboration would injure my own art, and was perhaps right. Because his mind was argumentative, abstract, diagrammatic, mine sensuous, concrete, rhythmical, we argued about words. In later years, through much knowledge of the stage, through the exfoliation of my own style, I learnt that occasional prosaic words gave the impression of an active man speaking. In dream poetry, in Kubla Khan, in The Stream's Secret, every line, every word, can carry its unanalysable, rich associations; but if we dramatize some possible singer or speaker we remember that he is moved by one thing at a time, certain words must be dull and numb. Here and there in correcting my early poems I have introduced such numbness and dullness, turned, for instance, 'the curdpale moon' into the 'brilliant

moon', that all might seem, as it were, remembered with indifference, except some one vivid image. When I began to rehearse a play I had the defects of my early poetry; I insisted upon obvious all- pervading rhythm. Later on I found myself saying that only in those lines or words where the beauty of the passage came to its climax, must rhythm be obvious. Because Moore thought all drama should be about possible people set in their appropriate surroundings, because he was fundamentally a realist ('Who are his people?' he said after a performance of George Russell's Deirdre. 'Ours were cattle merchants') he required many dull, numb words. But he put them in more often than not because he had no feeling for words in themselves, none for their historical associations. He insisted for days upon calling the Fianna 'soldiers'. In A Storyteller's Holiday he makes a young man in the thirteenth century go to the 'salons' of 'the fashionable ladies' in Paris, in his last story men and women of the Homeric age read books. Our worst quarrels, however, were when he tried to be poetical, to write in what he considered my style. He made the dying Diarmuid say to Finn: 'I will kick you down the stairway of the stars'. My letters to Lady Gregory show that we made peace at last, Moore accepting my judgment upon words, I his upon construction. To that he would sacrifice what he had thought the day before not only his best scene but 'the best scene in any modern play', and without regret: all must receive its being from the central idea; nothing be in itself anything. He would have been a master of construction, but that his practice as a novelist made him long for descriptions and reminiscences. If Diarmuid and Grania failed in performance, and I am not sure that it did, it failed because the second act, instead of moving swiftly from incident to incident, was reminiscent and descriptive; almost a new first act. I had written enough poetical drama to know this and to point it out to Moore.

After the performance and just before our final quarrel the letters speak of an agreement to rewrite this act. I had sent Moore a scenario.

XVI

When in later years some play after months of work grew more and more incoherent, I blamed those two years' collaboration. My father began life a Pre-Raphaelite painter; when past thirty he fell under the influence of contemporary French painting. Instead of finishing a picture one square inch at a time, he kept all fluid, every detail dependent upon every other, and remained a poor man to the end of his life, because the more anxious he was to succeed, the more did his pictures sink through innumerable sittings into final confusion. Only when he was compelled to finish in eight or nine sittings were his pictures the work of a great painter. Deirdre and On Bailees Strand, unified after I had torn up many manuscripts, are more profound than the sentimental Land of Hearfs Desire, than the tapestry-like Countess Cathleen, finished scene by scene, but that first manner might have found its own profundity. It is not far from popular songs and stories with their traditional subject-matter and treatment, it travels a narrow path. A painter or poet can from the first carry the complete work in his head and so finish scene by scene, but when the puppet-play becomes Goethe's Faust, Parts I and II, when Gil Blas is transformed into Wilhelm Meister, the Waverley Novels into the Comedie Humaine, he must, unhelped by tradition, all nature there to tempt him, try, fail perhaps, to impose his own limits. Hodos Chameliontos had no terrors for Moore; he was more simple, more naive, more one-idea'd than a Bank-holiday schoolboy. Yet whatever effect that collaboration had on me, it was unmixed misfortune for Moore, it set him upon a pursuit of style that made barren his later years. I no longer underrate him, I know that he had written, or was about to write, five great

novels. But A Mummer's Wife, Esther Waters, Sister Teresa (everything is there of the convent, a priest said to me, except the religious life), Muslin, The Lake, gained nothing from their style. I may speak later of the books he was to write under what seems to me a misunderstanding of his powers.

England had turned from style, as it has been understood from the translators of the Bible to Walter Pater, sought mere clarity in statement and debate, a journalistic effectiveness, at the moment when Irish men of letters began to quote the saying of Sainte- Beuve: 'There is nothing immortal in literature except style'. Style was his growing obsession, he would point out all the errors of some silly experiment of mine, then copy it. It was from some such experiment that he learnt those long, flaccid, structureless sentences, 'and, and and, and and'; there is one of twenty-eight lines in Muslin. Sometimes he rebelled: 'Yeats, I have a deep distrust of any man who has a style', but it was generally I who tried to stop the obsession. 'Moore, if you ever get a style', I would say, 'it will ruin you. It is coloured glass and you need a plate-glass window.' When he formed his own circle he found no escape; the difficulties of modern Irish literature, from the loose, romantic, legendary stories of Standish O'Grady to James Joyce and Synge, had been in the formation of a style. He heard those difficulties discussed. All his life he had learnt from conversation, not from books. His nature, bitter, violent, discordant, did not fit him to write the sentences men murmur again and again for years. Charm and rhythm had been denied him. Improvement makes straight roads; he pumice-stoned every surface because will had to do the work for nature. I said once: 'You work so hard that, like the Lancelot of Tennyson, you will almost see the Grail'. But now, his finished work before me, I am convinced that he was denied even that 'almost'.

XVII

Douglas Hyde was at Coole in the summer of 1899. Lady Gregory, who had learnt Gaelic to satisfy her son's passing desire for a teacher, had founded a branch of the Gaelic League; men began to know the name of the poet whose songs they had sung for years. Lady Gregory and I wanted a Gaelic drama, and I made a scenario for a one-act play founded upon an episode in my Stories Red of Hanrahan; I had some hope that my invention, if Hyde would but accept it, might pass into legend as though he were a historical character. In later years Lady Gregory and I gave Hyde other scenarios and I always watched him with astonishment. His ordinary English style is without charm; he explores facts without explaining them, and in the language of the newspapers---Moore compared one of his speeches to frothing porter. His Gaelic, like the dialect of his Love Songs of Connacht, written a couple of years earlier, had charm, seemed all spontaneous, all joyous, every speech born out of itself. Had he shared our modern preoccupation with the mystery of life, learnt our modern construction, he might have grown into another and happier Synge. But emotion and imagery came as they would, not as he would; somebody else had to put them together. He had the folk mind as no modern man has had it, its qualities and its defects, and for a few days in the year Lady Gregory and I shared his absorption in that mind. When I wrote verse, five or six lines in two or three laborious hours were a day's work, and I longed for somebody to interrupt me; but he wrote all day, whether in verse or prose, and without apparent effort. Effort was there, but in the unconscious. He had given up verse writing because it affected his lungs or his heart. Lady Gregory kept watch, to draw him from his table after so many hours; the game-keeper had the boat and the guns ready; there were ducks upon the lake. He wrote in joy and at great speed because emotion brought the appropriate word. Nothing in that language of his was abstract, nothing

worn-out; he need not, as must the writer of some language exhausted by modern civilization, reject word after word, cadence after cadence; he had escaped our perpetual, painful, purification. I read him, translated by Lady Gregory or by himself into that dialect which gets from Gaelic its syntax and keeps its still partly Tudor vocabulary; little was, I think, lost.

> I was myself one time a poor barnacle goose;
> The night was not plain to me more than the day
> Till I got sight of her.

That does not impress me to-day; it is too easy to copy, too many have copied it; when I first read it, I was fresh from my struggle with Victorian rhetoric. I began to test my poetical inventions by translating them into like speech. Lady Gregory had already, I think, without knowing it, begun a transformation of her whole mind into the mind of the people, begun ‘to think like a wise man’ but to express herself like ‘the common people’. I proposed that Diarmuid and Grania should be turned or half turned into dialect, the rough, peasant-like characters using much, the others using little or none. But Moore was impatient and would not listen. Later on this method was more clearly defined by Lady Gregory. The more educated characters should use as much dialect as would seem natural in the mouth of some country gentleman who had spent all his life on his estate. It was first tested in The White Cockade. Deirdre of the Sorrows, had Synge lived to weave, as he had intended, a grotesque peasant element through the entire play, would have justified it by a world-famous masterpiece. It should have been obvious from the first; Shakespeare made his old man with the ass talk ‘Somerset’. The distant in time and space live only in the near and present. Lady Gregory’s successful translations from Moliere are in dialect.

The Indian yogi sinks into a trance, his thought, like his eye, fixed upon the point of his tongue, symbolical of all the senses. He must not meditate upon abstractions, nor, because unseen, upon eye and ear. Yet when I made my suggestion to Moore I was not sure, I was easily put off it. A movement develops in darkness and timidity, nor does it follow that Lady Gregory remembered my suggestion when she began The White Cockade; a movement is like an animal, its shape is from the seed.

XVIII

Diarmuid and Grania was read to famous actors and actresses, was greatly admired; a famous actress offered some hundreds as a first payment; but there was always the difficulty; there must be a simultaneous or first performance in Dublin. The actress said: ‘If you make a failure there, it will be no use coming to me’. I was in negotiation with her, but took to my bed with influenza. After a fortnight Moore came: ‘I have withdrawn the play. She asked me to call upon her manager. I said that her manager should call upon me. Am I not right?’ I said: ‘The naturalist Waterton climbed to the top of Saint Peter’s at Rome and put his glove on the lightning-conductor; such feats make me dizzy’. ‘But don’t you see it?’ he replied. ‘I thought her manager was going to refuse the play; now instead of that refusal getting into the papers there will be weeks of controversy as to whether a manager should call upon an author or an author upon a manager.”And now,’ I said, ‘in spite of all that, you want me to call upon her, repudiate you, and give the play back.’ Yes, that was what he wanted. He was repudiated, and all seemed well. I cannot remember, and my letters to Lady Gregory do not record, what arrangements were made or unmade except that Benson undertook the Dublin performance, with Mrs. Benson as Grania. ‘She will be all right’, said Moore. ‘She will play her body.’ Moore had behaved well,

although convinced that the play was worth ‘two thousand pounds’--- I learnt later that always when writing a play he valued it at that sum---he risked it for the sake of the Irish Literary Theatre. On October 2nd, 1901, Diarmuid and Grania, preceded by The Twisting of the Rope, was produced for a week by the Benson Company at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. Theatre managers must have thought it failed, or that the newspapers’ comments had taken freshness from it, for the London managers who had admired it in MS. were silent. Yet it did not seem to fail; when Maud Gonne and I got into our cab to go to some supper party after the performance, the crowd from the gallery wanted to take the horse out of the cab and drag us there, but Maud Gonne, weary of public demonstrations, refused. What was it like? York Powell, Scandinavian scholar, historian, an impressionable man, preferred it to Ibsen’s Vikings at Helgeland. I do not know. I have but a draft of some unfinished scenes, and of the performance I can but recall Benson’s athletic dignity in one scene and the notes of the horn in Elgar’s dirge over the dead Diarmuid. The Twisting of the Rope, Hyde as the chief character---he had always acted his speeches---, the enthusiasm of his Gaelic Leaguers for the first Gaelic play ever acted in a theatre, are still vivid. But then Lady Gregory’s translation of the Gaelic text has renewed my memory.

XIX

Moore had inherited a large Mayo estate, and no Mayo country gentleman had ever dressed the part so well. He lacked manners, but had manner; he could enter a room so as to draw your attention without seeming to, his French, his knowledge of painting, suggested travel and leisure. Yet nature had denied to him the final touch: he had a coarse palate. Edward Martyn alone suspected it. When Moore abused the waiter or the cook, he

had thought, ‘I know what he is hiding’. In a London restaurant on a night when the soup was particularly good, just when Moore had the spoon at his lip, he said: ‘Do you mean to say you are going to drink that?’ Moore tasted the soup, then called the waiter, and ran through the usual performance. Martyn did not undeceive him, content to chuckle in solitude. Moore had taken a house in Upper Ely Place; he spent a week at our principal hotel while his furniture was moving in: he denounced the food to the waiter, to the manager, went down to the kitchen and denounced it to the cook. ‘He has written to the proprietress’, said the manager, ‘that the steak is like brown paper. How can you believe a word such a man would say, a steak cannot be like brown paper.’ He had his own bread sent in from the baker and said on the day he left: ‘How can these people endure it?”Because’, said the admiring head-waiter, ‘they are not comme il faut.’ A little later I stayed with him and wrote to Lady Gregory: ‘He is boisterously enduring the sixth cook’. Then from Sligo a few days later: ‘Moore dismissed the sixth cook the day I left---six in three weeks. One brought in a policeman, Moore had made so much noise. He dragged the policeman into the dining-room and said: “Is there a law in this country to compel me to eat this abominable omelette?”‘

Sometimes Moore, instead of asking us to accept for true some monstrous invention, would press a spontaneous action into deliberate comedy; starting in bad blood or blind passion, he would all in a moment see himself as others saw him. When he arrived in Dublin, all the doors in Upper Ely Place had been painted white by an agreement between the landlord and the tenants. Moore had his door painted green, and three Miss Beams---no, I have not got the name quite right---who lived next door protested to the landlord. Then began a correspondence between Moore and the landlord wherein Moore insisted on his position as an art critic, that the

whole decoration of his house required a green door--- I imagine that he had but wrapped the green flag around him---then the indignant young women bought a copy of Esther Waters, tore it up, put the fragments into a large envelope, wrote thereon:' Too filthy to keep in the house', dropped it into his letter-box. I was staying with Moore, I let myself in with a latch-key some night after twelve, and found a note on the hall table asking me to put the door on the chain. As I was undressing, I heard Moore trying to get in; when I had opened the door and pointed to the note he said: 'Oh, I forgot. Every night I go out at eleven, at twelve, at one, and rattle my stick on the railing to make the Miss Beams' dogs bark.' Then I saw in the newspapers that the Miss Beams had hired organ-grinders to play under Moore's window when he was writing, that he had prosecuted the organ-grinders. Moore had a large garden on the other side of the street, a blackbird sang there; he received his friends upon Saturday evening and made a moving speech upon the bird. 'I enjoy its song. If I were the bad man people say I am, could I enjoy its song?' He wrote every morning at an open window on the ground floor, and one morning saw the Miss Beams' cat cross the street, and thought, 'That cat will get my bird'. He went out and filled his pocket with stones, and whenever he saw the cat, threw a stone. Somebody, perhaps the typist, must have laughed, for the rest of the tale fills me with doubt. I was passing through Dublin just on my way to Coole; he came to my hotel. 'I remembered how early that cat got up. I thought it might get the blackbird if I was not there to protect it, so I set a trap. The Miss Beams wrote to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and I am carrying on a correspondence with its secretary, cat versus bird.' (Perhaps after all, the archives of the Society do contain that correspondence. The tale is not yet incredible.) I passed through Dublin again, perhaps on my way back. Moore came to see me in seeming great depression.

‘Remember that trap?”Yes.”Remember that bird?”Yes.”I have caught the bird.’

Moore gave a garden party during the annual festival of the Gaelic League; there was a Gaelic play by Douglas Hyde based upon a scenario of Moore’s, and to this garden party he invited the Catholic Archbishop, beginning the letter with: ‘Cher confrere’. The Archbishop did not answer. He had already in a letter to the Press invited the Archbishop to institute a stage censorship. ‘But, my dear Yeats, Archbishops are educated men. If there is some difficulty about a play, I will call upon him. I will explain. He will approve the play. No more mob rule. No more such trouble as we had about The Countess Cathleen. No more letters to the Press signed “Father of a Family”.’

XX

I was depressed; we had promised, seeing no other way, to bring over English actors for a week in every year for three years, and now the three years were up. Moore wanted to negotiate with Benson for a stock company, taught by English actors, or made up of actors chosen by Benson, or with such actors in the principal parts. At first it seemed probable that Martyn would find the money; I urged him to employ Gordon Craig, a young unknown man who had staged a Purcell opera at his own or his friends’ expense. But Martyn said with characteristic decision: ‘Henceforth I will pay for nobody’s plays but my own’. Perhaps somebody, or some committee, would take his place, negotiation dragged on; perhaps Moore’s unpopularity, or mine, made Benson hesitate. We had attacked Queen Victoria, said that she came to Ireland recruiting, that she had, in Moore’s words, driven through the city ‘a shilling between her finger and thumb, a bag of shillings under the seat’. William Fay and his brother, whose

company of amateurs played in a Lockhart's coffee-house, were putting their case, and all my Nationalist friends backing it. I summarized their arguments in Samhain, a little annual published in the interests of the movement. Any project that needed much money would have to promise good behaviour, and Ireland was turning towards revolution, but I did not give my own opinion. As yet I had none, and if I had I would have held it back.

I felt that Moore wanted the professional stage that he had known all his life. I wanted to keep him in good humour till Diarmuid and Grania was finished; we had learnt from the performance, and he had just accepted my sketch of a new second act. Then I wanted to write; I had been organizing for ten years and if I joined Fay I saw no end to it. I felt acutely my unpopularity and told my publisher not to send my books for review in Ireland, a decision kept for many years. A. H. Bullen, Elizabethan scholar, a handsome man with a great mass of curly grey hair, at that time my publisher, came to Dublin. 'He told me', I wrote to Lady Gregory, 'that he was amazed to find the hostility of the booksellers. A---, he declared, seemed hardly to like to speak my name. I am looked upon as heterodox. The Secret Rose was particularly disapproved of, but they spoke with hostility, too, of The Shadowy Waters.... Memory of the Countess Cathleen dispute accounts for a great deal. Bullen found the Protestant booksellers little better, asked if T. C. D. disliked me. B---, the College bookseller, said, "What is he doing here? Why doesn't he go away and leave us in peace?" Bullen was rather drunk, but his travellers gave the same account. He had tried to sell a book of Carleton's, too, and said that Carleton and I were received with the same suspicion. This was, of course, because of Carleton's early stories. I imagine that as I withdraw from politics my friends among the Nationalists grow less and my foes more numerous.

What I have heard confirms the idea that I had at the time of the Countess Cathleen row, that it would make a serious difference in my position.' I had withdrawn from politics because I could not bear perplexing, by what I said about books, the simple patriotic men whose confidence I had gained by what I said about nationality.

Some work connected with our theatrical project brought Lady Gregory to Dublin. Bullen asked to be introduced, and until we arrived at her hotel I did not notice how drunk he was. When he sat down he was on the verge of tears. 'Yeats is an astrologer. He knows the moment of my death. No, no, it is no use denying it, he knows the moment of my death.' Presently I wrote from Sligo that my uncle, the High Sheriff, had been warned that I must keep away from a certain Club. Moore was constantly attacked in the English Press, and every attack reached Dublin. I found that certain of our enemies were passing round some article in a monthly review, pointing out the plagiarisms in his Modern Painting, and I, not knowing how well-founded the attack was, had suggested a reply. 'The man I object to', said Moore, 'is the man who plagiarizes without knowing it; I always know; I took ten pages.' To Lady Gregory he said, 'We both quote well, but you always put inverted commas, I never do'.

XXI

I saw William Fay's amateur company play Miss Milligan's Red Hugh, an historical play in two scenes in the style of Walter Scott. 'Yonder battlements', all the old rattle-traps acquired modernity, reality, spoken by those voices. I came away with my head on fire. I wanted to hear my own unfinished On Bailees Strand, to hear Greek tragedy, spoken with a Dublin accent. After consulting with Lady Gregory I gave William Fay my Cathleen ni Houlihan, the first play where dialect was not used with an

exclusively comic intention, to be produced in April 1902, in a hall attached to a church in a back street. A. E. gave his Deirdre, a protest against Diarmuid and Grania because the play had made mere men out of heroes. It was well constructed (A. E. in later years gave plots, or incidents that suggested plots, to several dramatists), but all its male characters resembled Lord Tennyson's King Arthur. Five or six years earlier he had published his lovely Homeward; Songs by the Way, and because of those poems and what he was in himself, writers or would-be writers, among them James Stephens, who has all my admiration to-day, gathered at his house upon Sunday nights, making it a chief centre of literary life in Dublin. I was not friendly with that centre, considering it made up for the most part of 'barren rascals'---critics as Balzac saw critics. For the next few years it seemed to lead the opposition, not the violent attacks, but the sapping and mining. A. E. himself, then as always, I loved and hated, and when I read or saw his play, I distrusted my judgment, fearing it mere jealousy, or some sort of party dislike. It was admired by everybody, hurt no national susceptibility, but in a few years A. E. himself abandoned it as Moore and I abandoned Diarmuid and Grania. I wrote to Lady Gregory, who was then in Italy: 'They took to Deirdre from the first. The hall was crowded and great numbers could not get in. I hated Deirdre. In fact I did not remain in the theatre because I was nervous about it. I still hate it, but I suppose Moore is the only person who shares my opinion. When I saw it in rehearsal I thought it superficial and sentimental as I thought when it came out in the All Ireland Review. Cathleen ni Houlihan was also enthusiastically received. The one defect was that the mild humour of the part before Cathleen came in kept them in such delighted laughter that it took them some little while to realize the tragic meaning of Cathleen's part though Maud Gonne played it magnificently and with weird power. I should have

struck a tragic note at the start.' Then two days later: 'The plays are over. Last night was the most enthusiastic of all. The audience now understands Cathleen ni Houlihan and there is no difficulty in getting from humour to tragedy. There is continual applause, and strange to say I like Deirdre. The absence of character is like the absence of individual expression in wall decoration. It was acted with great simplicity; the actors kept very quiet, often merely posing and speaking. The result was curiously dream-like and gentle. Russell is planning a play on the Children of Tuireann and will, I imagine, do quite a number of plays. The costumes and scenery from designs of his were beautiful; there was a thin gauze veil in front. It was really a wonderful sight to see crowds of people standing up at the back of the hall where they could hardly see because there were people in front, yet patient, and enthusiastic.' I gave Fay a little farce, The Pot of Broth, written with Lady Gregory's help but showing that neither Lady Gregory nor I could yet distinguish between the swift-moving town dialect- --the dialect of the Irish novelists no matter what part of Ireland they wrote of---and the slow-moving country dialect. In Cathleen ni Houlihan, written too with Lady Gregory's help, the dialect is as it were neutral, neither predominantly town nor country; my stage technique, swifter than Lady Gregory's when a tragic crisis is the theme, had pared it to the bone. It was, I think, this spareness, or barrenness, that made Arthur Symons tell me after he had seen Synge's first play to write no more peasant plays.

I had joined Fay's dramatic society but had as yet no authority. I wrote to Lady Gregory that I had not marked my scornful analysis of one of Fay's dramatists 'private' because 'the sooner I have that man for an enemy the better'. When The Pot of Broth was played in the Antient Concert Rooms in October, that trivial, unambitious retelling of an old folk-tale showed William Fay for the first time as a most lovable comedian. He could play

dirty tramp, stupid countryman, legendary fool, insist on dirt and imbecility, yet play---paradox of the stage---with indescribable personal distinction.

XXII

In the early autumn Zola died, asphyxiated by a charcoal stove.

Innumerable paragraphs and leading articles made Moore jealous and angry; he hated his own past in Zola. He talked much to his friends on Saturday nights. ‘Anybody can get himself asphyxiated.’ Then after some six weeks announced that he himself had awakened that very morning to smell gas, a few minutes more and he would have been dead; the obsession was over. But there had been another torture earlier in the year. A brother of his, Augustus Moore, a London journalist, had taken an action about a scenario, whether against an actor, a writer or a manager, I cannot remember; he would appear in the witness-box, be examined, cross-examined, re-examined, and would not, could not, rise to the occasion, whereas he, George Moore, could have been amusing, profound, all the world looking on. When it seemed likely that Benson, or some company brought together by Martyn, would continue the Irish Literary Theatre, I had told Moore a fantastic plot for a play, suggested collaboration, and for twenty minutes or half an hour walked up and down a path in his garden discussing it. He proposed that my hero’s brother should seduce the housemaid. When I had decided to work with Fay, Moore had withdrawn from the movement. I had written him regretting that I must write that play without his help. He did not answer, the letter required no answer. Weeks or months passed, then at some Gaelic festival in the town of Galway we met. I saw that he had something on his mind, he was gloomy and silent. I pointed out the number of young women with Douglas Hyde’s pseudonym in gilt letters round their hats: ‘No woman, Moore, has ever done that for

you', I said. He took my banter well, threw off his gloom; had I not started his favourite theme? But on his return to Dublin he telegraphed: 'I have written a novel on that scenario we composed together. Will get an injunction if you use it.' Had I known about his brother's law-case I would have known that Moore had not written a line and that his telegram was drama; knowing nothing, I wrote or telegraphed that I would use nothing of his but would certainly use my own plot. I went to Coole, asked the assistance of Lady Gregory and of a certain cautious friend, whose name must be left out of this narrative, and in a fortnight they and I dictated or wrote a five-act tragedy. I called it Where there is Nothing and published it as a supplement to United Ireland, afterwards the organ of the Sinn Fein movement. Moore had been talking and his talk had reached me, he was expecting a London trial, and this was checkmate. Boys were shouting the supplement in the streets as he came out of the Antient Concert Rooms, where he had seen Fay's company. He bought a copy, spoke to nobody about it, always declared that he never read it, nor any other edition of the play. 'Has Yeats' hero got a brother?' he said to somebody. 'Yes."Then Yeats has stolen the spoons.' But my hero's brother was in a monastery. Some months later an American friend, John Quinn, a strong supporter and helper of our movement, brought us together, but we were never cordial again; on my side distrust remained, on his disgust. I look back with some remorse. 'Yeats,' Moore had said, 'a man can only have one conscience, mine is artistic.' Had I abandoned my plot and made him write the novel, he might have put beside Muslin and The Lake a third masterpiece, but I was young, vain, self-righteous, and bent on proving myself a man of action. Where there is Nothing is a bad play; I had caught sight of Tolstoy's essay about the Sermon on the Mount lying on a chair and made the most important act pivot upon pacificist commonplace. I soon came to my

senses, refused a distinguished Frenchman permission to translate it, and in later years with Lady Gregory's help turned it into The Unicorn from the Stars. For the moment it was successful; it could not be played in Ireland for religious reasons, but the Stage Society found an approving audience and it set the tinkers of Mayo rioting. My anonymous collaborator, when asked to name a tinker in the play, had named him after a real tinker. A farmer who had read the United Ireland supplement reproached that tinker for letting his daughter marry a man with no visible means of subsistence and permitting her to solemnize the marriage by jumping over a bucket. The angry parent called God to witness that he had done no such thing, other farmers and tinkers joined what grew into a considerable fight, and all were brought up before the magistrate.

XXIII

During these first years Lady Gregory was friend and hostess, a centre of peace, an adviser who never overestimated or underestimated trouble, but neither she nor we thought her a possible creator. And now all in a moment, as it seemed, she became the founder of modern Irish dialect literature. When her husband died she had sold her London house, hiring instead a small flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, lived most of the year at Coole, cutting down expenses that her son might inherit an unencumbered estate. In early life she had written two or three articles, such as many clever fashionable women write, more recently had edited her husband, Sir William Gregory's, Autobiography and Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box, a volume of letters to Richard Gregory, Irish Under-Secretary at the beginning of the nineteenth century, from Palmerston, Wellesley, many famous men, drawn from the Coole archives. Some slight desire to create had been put aside until her son reached manhood; but now he had left the university and she

was fifty. I told her that Alfred Nutt had offered to supply me with translations of the Irish heroic cycles if I would pick the best versions and put my English upon them, attempting what Malory had done for the old French narratives. I told her that I was too busy with my own work. Some days later she asked if I would object to her attempting it, making or finding the translations herself. An eminent Trinity College professor had described ancient Irish literature as ‘silly, religious, or indecent’, and she thought such work necessary for the dignity of Ireland. ‘We work to add dignity to Ireland’ was a favourite phrase of hers. I hesitated, I saw nothing in her past to fit her for that work; but in a week or two she brought a translation of some heroic tale, what tale I cannot now remember, in the dialect of the neighbourhood, where one discovers the unemphatic cadence, the occasional poignancy of Tudor English. Looking back, Cuchulain of Muirthemne and Gods and Fighting Men at my side, I can see that they were made possible by her past; semi-feudal Roxborough, her inherited sense of caste, her knowledge of that top of the world where men and women are valued for their manhood and their charm, not for their opinions, her long study of Scottish Ballads, of Percy’s Reliques, of the Morte d’Arthur. If she had not found those tales, or finding them had not found the dialect of Kiltartan, that past could not, as it were, have drawn itself together, come to birth as present personality. Sometimes in her letters, in her books when she wrote ordinary English, she was the late-Victorian woman turning aside from reality to what seems pleasing, or to a slightly sentimental persiflage as a form of politeness---in society, to discover ‘eternity glaring’, as Carlyle did when he met Charles Lamb for the first time, is scarcely in good taste---but in her last years, when speaking in her own character, she seemed always her greater self. A writer must die every day he lives, be reborn, as it is said in the Burial Service, an

incorruptible self, that self opposite of all that he has named ‘himself’. George Moore, dreading the annihilation of an impersonal bleak realism, used life like a mediaeval ghost making a body for itself out of drifting dust and vapour; and have I not sung in describing guests at Coole--- ‘There one that ruffled in a manly pose, For all his timid heart’--- that one myself? Synge was a sick man picturing energy, a doomed man picturing gaiety; Lady Gregory, in her life much artifice, in her nature much pride, was born to see the glory of the world in a peasant mirror. ‘I saw the household of Finn; it was not the household of a soft race; I had a vision of that man yesterday.... A King of heavy blows; my law; my adviser, my sense and my wisdom, prince and poet, braver than kings, King of the Fianna, brave in all countries; golden salmon of the sea, clean hawk of the air... a high messenger in bravery and in music. His skin lime- white, his hair golden; ready to work, gentle to women. His great green vessels full of rough sharp wine, it is rich the king was, the head of his people.’ And then Grania’s song over the sleeping Diarmuid: —

‘“Sleep a little, sleep a little, for there is nothing at all to fear, Diarmuid, grandson of Duibhne; sleep here soundly, soundly, Diarmuid, to whom I have given my love. It is I will keep watch for you, grandchild of shapely Duibhne; sleep a little, a blessing on you, beside the well of the strong field; my lamb from above the lake, from the banks of the strong streams. Let your sleep be like the sleep in the North of fair comely Fionnchadh of Ess Ruadh, the time he took Slaine with bravery as we think, in spite of Failbhe of the Hard Head.

“Let your sleep be like the sleep in the West of Aine, daughter of Gailian, the time she went on a journey in the night with Dubhthach from Dorinis, by the light of torches.

“Let your sleep be like the sleep in the East of Deaghadh the proud, the brave fighter, the time he took Coincheann, daughter of Binn, in spite of fierce Decheall of Duibhreann.

“O heart of the valour of the world to the west of Greece, my heart will go near to breaking if I do not see you every day. The parting of us two will be the parting of two children of the one house; it will be the parting of life from the body.”

‘And then to rouse him she would make another song, and it is what she would say: “Caoinche will be loosed on your track; it is not slow the running of Caoilte will be; do not let death reach to you, do not give yourself to sleep forever.

“The stag to the East is not asleep, he does not cease from bellowing; the bog lark is not asleep to-night on the high stormy bogs; the sound of her clear voice is sweet; she is not sleeping between the streams.”‘

THE END

Estrangement Extracts from a Diary Kept in 1909

I

To keep these notes natural and useful to me I must keep one note from leading on to another, that I may not surrender myself to literature. Every note must come as a casual thought, then it will be my life. Neither Christ nor Buddha nor Socrates wrote a book, for to do that is to exchange life for a logical process.

II

Last night there was a debate in the Arts Club on a political question. I was for a moment tempted to use arguments merely to answer something said, but did not do so, and noticed that every argument I had been tempted to use was used by somebody or other. Logic is a machine, one can leave it to itself; unhelped it will force those present to exhaust the subject, the fool is as likely as the sage to speak the appropriate answer to any statement, and if an answer is forgotten somebody will go home miserable. You throw your money on the table and you receive so much change.

Style, personality — deliberately adopted and therefore a mask---is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers and the moneychangers.

III

I have been talking to a man typical of a class common elsewhere but new in Ireland: often not ill-bred in manner and therefore the more manifestly with the ill-breeding of the mind, every thought made in some

manufactory and with the mark upon it of its wholesale origin---thoughts never really thought out in their current form in any individual mind, but the creation of impersonal mechanism---of schools, of text-books, of newspapers, these above all. He had that confidence which the first thinker of anything never has, for all thinkers are alike in that they approach the truth full of hesitation and doubt. Confidence comes from repetition, from the breath of many mouths. This ill-breeding of the mind is a far worse thing than the mere bad manners that spit on the floor. Is not all charm inherited, whether of the intellect, of the manners, of the character, or of literature? A great lady is as simple as a good poet. Neither possesses anything that is not ancient and their own, and both are full of uncertainty about everything but themselves, about everything that can be changed, about all that they merely think. They assume convictions as if they were a fashion in clothes and re-mould all slightly.

IV

The articles upon The Miser in to-day's paper show the old dislike of farce and dialect; written by men who are essentially parvenus in intellectual things, they shudder at all that is not obviously and notoriously refined ---the objection to the word 'shift' over again. Our Abbey secretary has a deep hatred of Moliere. None of these people can get it out of their heads that we are exaggerating the farce of Moliere. We reduce it. Years ago Dr. Sigerson said of the last verse of my Moll Magee, 'Why candles? Surely tapers?'

V

To oppose the new ill-breeding of Ireland, which may in a few years destroy all that has given Ireland a distinguished name in the world--

-’Mother of the bravest soldiers and the most beautiful women’, cried Borrow, or some such words, remembering the hospitality shown to him, a distributor of Bibles, by the Irish Monks of Spain---I can only set up a secondary or interior personality created out of the tradition of myself, and this personality (alas, only possible to me in my writings) must be always gracious and simple. It must have that slight separation from interests which makes charm possible, while remaining near enough for passion. Is not charm what it is because an escape from mechanism? So much of the world as is dominated by the contest of interests is a mechanism. The newspaper is the roar of the machine. Argument, the moment acknowledged victory is sought, becomes a clash of interests. One should not---above all in books, which sigh for immortality---argue at all if not ready to leave to another apparent victory. In daily life one becomes rude the moment one grudges to the clown his perpetual triumph.

VI

My father says, ‘A man does not love a woman because he thinks her clever or because he admires her, but because he likes the way she has of scratching her head’.

VII

It seems to me that true love is a discipline, and it needs so much wisdom that the love of Solomon and Sheba must have lasted, for all the silence of the Scriptures. Each divines the secret self of the other, and refusing to believe in the mere daily self, creates a mirror where the lover or the beloved sees an image to copy in daily life; for love also creates the Mask.

VIII

Our modern poetry is imaginative. It is the poetry of the young. The poetry of the greatest periods is a sustained expression of the appetites and habits. Hence we select where they exhausted.

IX

I have remembered to-day that the Brahmin Mohini said to me, ‘When I was young I was happy. I thought truth was something that could be conveyed from one man’s mind to another. I now know that it is a state of mind.’

X

Last night I met A---. [Note: The initials used in these extracts are never those of the persons quoted or described. With the exception of A. E., George Russell’s pseudonym, they are copied from a dictionary of painters, the initials or initial of the first name under A, then of the second under A or of the first under B and so on.] There was some rich man there, and some person spoke of the great power that wealth might have for good. The rich man was talking of starting a deer forest in Connacht. A--- said, ‘Wealth has very little power, it can really do very little’. I said, ‘Yet every now and then one meets some charming person who likes all fine things and is quite delightful and who would not have had these qualities if some great-grandfather had not sold his country for gold’. A--- answered, ‘I admit that wealth occasionally- --Darwin is an example — enables someone to write a great book’. I answered, ‘O, I was not thinking of that. I meant that it creates the fine life which we look at with affectionate eyes out of our garret windows. We must not leave our garrets, but we could not write well but for

what we see from their windows.' A--- answered, 'Then writers are parasites'. I noticed that most of the guests seemed, besides A--- and the rich man, too sympathetic and anxious to please; I myself among the rest. We talked, they were talked to. Dean B--- was there too, a charming and intelligent man with an ingratiating manner like that of certain well-educated Catholic priests, a manner one does not think compatible with deep spiritual experience. We discussed self-realization and self- sacrifice. He said the classic self-realization had failed and yet the victory of Christian self-sacrifice had plunged the world into the Dark Ages. I reminded him of some Norse God, who was hung over an abyss for three days, 'a sacrifice to himself', to show that the two were not incompatible, but he answered, 'Von Hartmann discusses the question whether the soul may not sacrifice itself, even to the losing of itself, for some good end'. I said, 'That is the problem of my Countess Cathleen\ and he said,' It is a further problem whether a nation may make this sacrifice'. He must have been thinking of Ireland.

XI

I see clearly that when I rewrite The Adoration of the Magi the message given to the old men must be a series of seemingly arbitrary commands: A year of silence, certain rules of diet, and so on. Without the arbitrary there cannot be religion, because there cannot be the last sacrifice, that of the spirit. The old men should refuse to record the message on hearing that it contains not wisdom but the supernaturally sanctioned arbitrary, the commanded pose that makes all definite. The tree has to die before it can be made into a cross.

XII

I have noticed that when these men (certain disciples of A. E.) take to any kind of action it is to some kind of extreme politics. Partly, I think, because they have never learned the discipline which enables the most ardent nature to accept obtainable things, even if a little sadly; but still more because they cannot believe in any success that is not in the unconditioned future, and because, like an artist described by Balzac, they long for popularity that they may believe in themselves.

XIII

A. E. endures them because he has the religious genius, for to the religious genius all souls are of equal value: the queen is not more than an old apple-woman. His poetical genius does not affect his mind as a whole, and probably he puts aside as unworthy every suggestion of his poetical genius which would separate man from man. The most fundamental of divisions is that between the intellect, which can only do its work by saying continually ‘thou fool’, and the religious genius which makes all equal. That is why we have discovered that the mountain-top and the monastery are necessary to civilization. Civilization dies of all those things that feed the soul, and both die if the Remnant refuse the wilderness.

XIV

One of their errors is to continually mistake a philosophical idea for a spiritual experience. The very preoccupation of the intellect with the soul destroys that experience, for everywhere impressions are checked by opinion.

XV

The real life being despised is only prized when sentimentalized over, and so the soul is shut off alike from earth and Heaven.

XVI

I heard Miss A--- B--- speak this the other day: ‘We have such a wonderful cat and it is so full of dignity that if the kitten goes to take its food it leaves the dish. It will not struggle. It will not assert itself. And what’s more, our cat won’t eat at all if there is not a perfectly clean napkin spread under the plate. I assure you it is quite true. I have often noticed it. It will not eat if there is even a spot on the napkin.’

XVII

When A. E. and I were fellow-students at the art-schools there was a strange mad pious student who used to come sometimes with a daisy chain round his neck. A. E. lent him a little theosophical book, Light on the Path. He stayed away for several days and then came one day looking very troubled. He gave the book back saying, ‘You will drift into a penumbra’.

XVIII

In Christianity what was philosophy in Eastern Asia became life, biography and drama. A play passes through the same process in being written. At first, if it has psychological depth, there is a bundle of ideas, something that can be stated in philosophical terms; my Countess Cathleen, for instance, was once the moral question, may a soul sacrifice itself for a good end? but gradually philosophy is eliminated until at last the only philosophy audible, if there is even that, is the mere expression of one

character or another. When it is completely life it seems to the hasty reader a mere story. Was the Bhagavad Gita the ‘scenario’ from which the Gospels were made?

XIX

One reason for the tendency of the A. E. group to extreme political opinion is that a taste fed for long on milk diet thirsts for strong flavours. In England the reaction would be vice, in Ireland it is politics.

XX

I have once more met Miss A--- B---. ‘O, it is not because of the pictures that I said I liked Mr. Lane’s Gallery. I like it because it has such a beautiful atmosphere, because of the muffed glass.’

XXI

All empty souls tend to extreme opinion. It is only in those who have built up a rich world of memories and habits of thought that extreme opinions affront the sense of probability. Propositions, for instance, which set all the truth upon one side can only enter rich minds to dislocate and strain, if they can enter at all, and sooner or later the mind expels them by instinct.

XXII

There is a relation between discipline and the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may

accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of arduous full life. One constantly notices in very active natures a tendency to pose, or if the pose has become a second self a preoccupation with the effect they are producing. One notices this in Plutarch's Lives, and every now and then in some modern who has tried to live by classical ideas, in Oscar Wilde, for instance, and less obviously in men like Walt Whitman. Wordsworth is often flat and heavy, partly because his moral sense has no theatrical element, it is an obedience to a discipline which he has not created. This increases his popularity with the better sort of journalists, writers in the Spectator, for instance, with all who are part of the machine and yet care for poetry.

XXIII

All my life I have been haunted with the idea that the poet should know all classes of men as one of themselves, that he should combine the greatest possible personal realization with the greatest possible knowledge of the speech and circumstances of the world. Fifteen or twenty years ago I remember longing, with this purpose, to disguise myself as a peasant and wander through the West, and then to ship as sailor. But when one shrinks from all business with a stranger, and is unnatural with all who are not intimate friends, because one underrates or overrates unknown people, one cannot adventure forth. The artist grows more and more distinct, more and more a being in his own right as it were, but more and more loses grasp of the always more complex world. Some day setting out to find knowledge, like some pilgrim to the Holy Land, he will become the most romantic of characters. He will play with all masks.

XXIV

Tragedy is passion alone; and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wandering of passion; while comedy is the clash of character. Eliminate character from comedy and you get farce. Farce is bound together by incident alone. In practice most works are mixed: Shakespeare being tragi-comedy. Comedy is joyous because all assumption of a part, of a personal mask, whether of the individualized face of comedy or of the grotesque face of farce, is a display of energy, and all energy is joyous. A poet creates tragedy from his own soul, that soul which is alike in all men. It has not joy, as we understand that word, but ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual and imperfectly seen, perhaps, by all those that still live. The masks of tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy. They are allied to decoration and to the abstract figures of Egyptian temples. Before the mind can look out of their eyes the active will perishes, hence their sorrowful calm. Joy is of the will which labours, which overcomes obstacles, which knows triumph. The soul knows its changes of state alone, and I think the motives of tragedy are not related to action but to changes of state. I feel this but do not see clearly, for I am hunting truth into its thicket and it is my business to keep close to the impressions of sense, to common daily life. Yet is not ecstasy some fulfilment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of it like an overflowing well? Is not this what is meant by beauty?

XXV

Allingham and Davis have two different kinds of love of Ireland. In Allingham I find the entire emotion for the place one grew up in which I felt as a child. Davis on the other hand was concerned with ideas of Ireland,

with conscious patriotism. His Ireland was artificial, an idea built up in a couple of generations by a few commonplace men. This artificial idea has done me as much harm as the other has helped me. I tried to free myself from it, and all my enemies come from my fighting it in others. The beauty of peasant thought is partly from a spontaneity unspoiled by the artificial town-made thought. One cannot sum up a nation intellectually, and when the summing up is made by half-educated men the idea fills one with alarm. I remember when I was nine or ten years old walking along Kensington High Street so full of love for the fields and roads of Sligo that I longed---a strange sentiment for a child ---for earth from a road there that I might kiss it. I had no politics; a couple of years before, I had read with delight a volume of Orange verses belonging to my grandmother's stable- boy, and my mother, who loved Sligo where she had been born and bred with the same passion, was, if she had any politics, Unionist. This love was instinctive and left the soul free. If I could have kept it and yet never felt the influence of Young Ireland I had given a more profound picture of Ireland in my work. Synge's purity of genius comes in part from having kept this instinct and this alone. Emotion is always justified by time, thought hardly ever. It can only bring us back to emotion. I went to see Synge yesterday and found him ill: if he dies it will set me wondering if he could have lived had he not had his long misunderstanding with the wreckage of Young Ireland. Even a successful performance of one of his plays seems to have made him ill. My sister reminded me of this the other day and urged me not to revive the Playboy while he is ill. In one thing he and Lady Gregory are the strongest souls I have ever known. He and she alike have never for an instant spoken to me the thoughts of their inferiors as their own thoughts. I have never known them to lose the self-possession of their intellects. The others here---even Moore for all his defiance--- possess their own thoughts

above the general flood only for a season, and Moore has in addition an automatic combativeness that makes even his original thought a reaction not a creation. Both Synge and Lady Gregory isolate themselves, Synge instinctively and Lady Gregory consciously, from all contagious opinions of poorer minds: Synge so instinctively and naturally---helped certainly by the habits of an invalid---that no one is conscious of rejection. Lady Gregory's life is too energetic and complex for her rejections to be other than deliberate. I do neither the one nor the other, being too talkative, too full of belief in whatever thought lays hold on me to reject people from my company, and so keep by angry outbreaks which are pure folly, from these invasions of the soul. One must agree with the clown or be silent, for he has in him the strength and confidence of the multitudes.

Lady Gregory is planting trees; for a year they have taken up much of her time. Her grandson will be fifty years old before they can be cut. We artists, do not we also plant trees and it is only after some fifty years that we are of much value? Every day I notice some new analogy between the long-established life of the well-born and the artists' life. We come from the permanent things and create them, and instead of old blood we have old emotions and we carry in our heads always that form of society aristocracies create now and again for some brief moment at Urbino or Versailles. We too despise the mob and suffer at its hands, and when we are happiest we have some little post in the house of Duke Frederick where we watch the proud dreamless world with humility, knowing that our knowledge is invisible and that at the first breath of ambition our dreams vanish. If we do not see daily beautiful life at which we look as old men and women do at young children, we become theorists---thinkers as it is called, ---or else give ourselves to strained emotions, to some overflow of sentiment 'sighing after Jerusalem in the regions of the grave'. How can we

sing without our bush of whins, our clump of heather, and does not Blake say that it takes a thousand years to create a flower?

XXVI

Blake talking to Crabb Robinson said once that he preferred to any man of intellect a happy thoughtless person, or some such phrase. It followed, I suppose, from his praise of life---'all that lives is holy'---and from his dislike of abstract things. Balzac, though when he is praising some beautiful high-bred woman he makes one think he had the same preference, is too much taken up with his worship of the will, which cannot be thoughtless even if it can be happy, to be aware of the preference if he has it. Nietzsche had it doubtless at the moment when he imagined the 'Superman' as a child. We artists suffer in our art if we do not love most of all life at peace with itself and doing without forethought what its humanity bids it and therefore happily. We are, as seen from life, an artifice, an emphasis, an uncompleted arc perhaps. Those whom it is our business to cherish and celebrate are complete arcs. Because the life man sees is not the final end of things, the moment we attain to greatness of any kind by personal labour and will we become fragmentary, and find no task in active life which can use our finest faculties. We are compelled to think and express and not to do. Faust in the end was only able to reclaim land like some official of the Agricultural Board. It is right that Romeo should not be a man of intellect or learning, it is enough for us that there is nature in him. We see all his arc, for in literature we need completed things. Men of action, our celebrators of life and passion, should be in all men's eyes, but it is not well that we should be too much talked of. Plutarch was right when he said the artist should not be too prominent in the State because no young man, born for war and love, desires to be like Phidias. Life confesses to the Priest and

honours him, but we confess to Life and tell it all that we would do if we were young, beautiful and rich, and Life answers, ‘I could never have thought of all that for myself, I have so little time’. And it is our praise that it goes upon its way with shining eyes forgetting us.

XXVII

I have to speak to-night at the Arts Club and have no time for much preparation. I will speak, I think, of the life of a young Irishman, his gradual absorption in some propaganda. How the very nature of youth makes this come readily. Youth is always giving itself, expending itself. It is only after years that we begin the supreme work, the adapting of our energies to a chosen end, the disciplining of ourselves. A young man in Ireland meets only crude, impersonal things, things that make him like others. One cannot discuss his ideas or ideals, for he has none. He has not the beginning of aesthetic culture. He never tries to make his rooms charming, for instance. The slow perfecting of the senses which we call taste has not even begun. When he throws himself into the work of some league he succeeds just in so far as he puts aside all delicate and personal gifts. I myself know the sense of strain that comes when one speaks to ignorant or, still worse, half-ignorant men. There is a perpetual temptation not merely to oversimplification but to exaggeration, for all ignorant thought is exaggerated thought. I can only wish that a young Irishman of talent and culture may spend his life, from eighteen to twenty-five, outside Ireland. Can one prescribe duties to a developed soul?--- and I suppose him to grow conscious of himself in those years. If one can, I would wish him to return. I will then describe the idea of modern culture as I see it in some young

Oxford man: to have perfect taste; to have felt all the finest emotions that art can give.

The young Dublin man who sticks to his books becomes a pedant because he only believes in external things. I will then describe a debate at Oxford a few years ago when I felt so much pity for that young brilliant man full of feminine sensitiveness. Surely the ideal of culture expressed by Pater can only create feminine souls. The soul becomes a mirror not a brazier. This culture is self-knowledge in so far as the self is a calm, deliberating, discriminating thing, for when we have awakened our tastes, and criticized the world in tasting it, we have come to know ourselves; ourselves, not as misers, or spendthrifts, or magistrates, or pleaders, but as men, face to face with what is permanent in the world. Newman defines culture as wise receptivity, though I do not think he uses these words. Culture of this kind produces the most perfect flowers in a few high-bred women. It gives to its sons an exquisite delicacy. I will then compare the culture of the Renaissance, which seems to me founded not on self-knowledge but on knowledge of some other self, Christ or Caesar, not on delicate sincerity but on imitative energy.

XXVIII

This morning I got a letter telling me of A--- C---'s illness. I did not recognize her son's writing at first, and my mind wandered, I suppose because I was not well. I thought my mother was ill and that my sister was asking me to come at once: then I remembered that my mother died years ago and that more than kin was at stake. She has been to me mother, friend, sister and brother. I cannot realize the world without her---she brought to my wavering thoughts steadfast nobility. All the day the thought of losing her is like a conflagration in the rafters. Friendship is all the house I have.

XXIX

A--- C--- is better but writes in pencil that she ‘very nearly slipped away’. All Wednesday I heard Castiglione’s phrase ringing in my memory, ‘Never be it spoken without tears, the Duchess, too, is dead’, and that phrase, which---coming where it did among the numbering of his dead---often moved me till my eyes dimmed, brought before me now all his sorrow and my own, as though one saw the worth of life fade for ever.

Sickness brought me this Thought, in that scale of his: Why should I be dismayed Though flame had burned the whole World, as it were a coal, Now I have seen it weighed Against a soul?

XXX

I went for a walk in the woods with little E--- and we talked of religion. He said, ‘There is no longer belief, nobody with belief ever comes to my Bible Class but you yourself. If people believed, they would talk of God and Christ. They think it good taste not to talk of such things, and yet people always talk of what they care for. Belief makes a mind abundant.’ I thought of the perpetual desire of all lovers to talk of their love and how many lovers’ quarrels have come from it. I said, ‘What of the Dublin theosophists?’ He said fiercely, ‘They are thieves. They pick up names and thoughts all over the world and these never become being in their minds, never become their own, because they have no worship.’ He is not easy to understand, but I gradually drew from him these thoughts. ‘They are all self, all presumption. They do not know what it is to abase themselves before Christ, or their own Gods, or anything. If one does that, one is filled with life. Christ is so full of life that it flows into us. The whole world is vivid to us. They are all self, and so they despise the foundation.’ He means

by the foundation, life, nature. I said, ‘But what are the forms they see?’ He answered, ‘They can only be lesser spirits--- part of what they call the Astral---creatures that live on them and draw away their life’. I said, ‘Must one therefore either feed or be fed?’ He said, ‘Yes, surely. Have you not noticed that they are all fluid, tenuous, flimsy-minded? You know Miss A---B---? They are all like that. It is the astral fluid. There is no life, the life has been sucked out. They despise the foundation, and that no one can do till after the resurrection. They are all self, and so they live on stolen goods. Of course there are a few chosen spirits who need not enter into life, but they are very few. Ah! if only one could see all boys and girls after nineteen married.’ He told me earlier in the day that once when mountaineering he was in great danger. Someone had slipped and dragged another with him, and he had the weight of two men hanging from the rope---but he felt a great being descending into him and strengthening him. Even when the danger was over he felt no loss of nerve as he looked back on the danger. He had been filled with life. On the way back E--- said, ‘There is so little life now. Look at the modern soldier---he is nothing---and the ancient soldier was something---he had to be strong and skilful, they fought man to man.’ I said, ‘There are some books like that — ideas as wonderful as a campaign by Moltke, but no man. The plan of campaign was not so impressive in the old books, but all was human!’ He answered, ‘When races cease to believe in Christ, God takes the life out of them, at last they cease to procreate’. E--- himself, all muscular force and ardour, makes me think of that line written, as one believes, of Shakespeare by Ben Jonson ---’So rammed with life that he can but grow in life with being’. The irregular line of his thought which makes him obscure is itself a sign of this. He is as full of twists and turns as a tree.

XXXI

The other day when I was speaking at the Arts Club someone asked me what life I would recommend to young Irishmen, the thought my whole speech if it were logical should have led up to. I was glad to be able to reply, ‘I do not know, though I have thought much about it’. Who does not distrust complete ideas?

XXXII

There is an astrological sense in which a man’s wife or sweetheart is always an Eve made from a rib of his body. She is drawn to him because she represents a group of stellar influences in the radical horoscope. These influences also create an element in his character, and his destiny, in things apart from love or marriage. Whether this element be good or evil she is therefore its external expression. The happiest have such horoscopes that they find what they have of good in their wives, others must find what they have of evil, or a man may have both affinities. Sometimes a man may find the evil of his horoscope in a woman, and in rescuing her from her own self may conquer his own evil, as with Simon Magus who married a harlot. Others may find in a woman the good that conquers them and shapes them. All external events of life are of course an externalization of character in the same way, but not to the same degree as the wife, who may represent the gathering up of an entire web of influences. A friend represented by a powerful star in the eleventh house may be the same, especially if the sun apply to the star. We are mirrors of the stellar light and we cast this light outward as incidents, magnetic attractions, characterizations, desires. This casting outward of the light is that fall into the circumference the mystics talk of.

XXXIII

By implication the philosophy of Irish faery lore declares that all power is from the body, all intelligence from the spirit. Western civilization, religion and magic insist on power and therefore on body, and hence these three doctrines---efficient rule---the Incarnation---thaumaturgy. Eastern thoughts answer to these with indifference to rule, scorn of the flesh, contemplation of the formless. Western minds who follow the Eastern way become weak and vapoury, because unfit for the work forced upon them by Western life. Every symbol is an invocation which produces its equivalent expression in all worlds. The Incarnation invoked modern science and modern efficiency, and individualized emotion. It produced a solidification of all those things that grow from individual will. The historical truth of the Incarnation is indifferent, though the belief in that truth was essential to the power of the invocation. All civilization is held together by the suggestions of an invisible hypnotist---by artificially created illusions. The knowledge of reality is always in some measure a secret knowledge. It is a kind of death.

XXXIV

While Lady Gregory has brought herself to death's door with overwork, to give us, while neglecting no other duty, enough plays, translated or original, to keep the Theatre alive, our base half-men of letters, or rather half-journalists, that coterie of patriots who have never been bought because no one ever thought them worth a price, have been whispering everywhere that she takes advantage of her position as director to put her own plays upon the stage. When I think, too, of Synge dying at this moment of their bitterness and ignorance, as I believe, I wonder if I have been right to shape my style to sweetness and serenity, and there comes into my mind that verse that Fergus spoke, 'No man seeks my help because I be not of the things I

dream'. On the night of the 'Playboy debate' they were all there, silent and craven, but not in the stalls for fear they might be asked to speak and face the mob. A--- D--- even refused by a subterfuge and joined the others in the gallery. No man of all literary Dublin dared show his face but my own father, who spoke to, or rather in the presence of, that howling mob with sweetness and simplicity. I fought them, he did a finer thing---forgot them.

XXXV

Those who accuse Synge of some base motive are the greatgrandchildren of those Dublin men who accused Smith O'Brien of being paid by the Government to fail. It is of such as these Goethe thought when he said, 'The Irish always seem to me like a pack of hounds dragging down some noble stag'.

XXXVI

Last night, Miss Allgood, who has been bad hitherto, gave a good performance in Kincora. This play in its new form gives me the greatest joy---colour, speech, all has its music, and the scenes with the servants make one feel intimate and friendly with those great people who otherwise would be far off---mere figures of speech. The joy that this play gives makes me understand how much I dislike plays like --- and --- and ---.If at all possible I will now keep at the Theatre till I have seen produced a mass of fine work. If we can create a taste for translated work---which we have not yet done---we can carry on the Theatre without vulgarity. If not, the mere growth of the audience will make all useless, for the Irish town mind will by many channels, public and private, press its vulgarity upon us. If we should feel that happening, if the Theatre is not to continue as we have shaped it, it must, for the sake of our future influence, for the sake of our

example, be allowed to pass out of our hands, or cease. We must not be responsible for a compromise.

XXXVII

Last night I read E--- a passage in which Coventry Patmore says we cannot teach another religious truth; we can only point out to him a way whereby he may find it for himself. E--- said, 'If one could show another religious experience, which is of the whole being, one would have to give one's whole being, one would be Christ. He alone can give Himself.'

XXXVIII

I often wonder if my talent will ever recover from the heterogeneous labour of these last few years. The younger Hallam says that vice does not destroy genius but that the heterogeneous does. I cry out vainly for liberty and have ever less and less inner life. Evil comes to us men of imagination wearing as its mask all the virtues. I have certainly known more men destroyed by the desire to have wife and child and to keep them in comfort than I have seen destroyed by drink and harlots. L--- E--- at the Rhymers' Club used to say that he meant to have a butler and that he thought it his duty to his wife to keep a house on that scale. Harlots in his case finished what the virtues began, but it was the virtues and not the harlots that killed his knack of verse. I thought myself loving neither vice nor virtue; but virtue has come upon me and given me a nation instead of a home. Has it left me any lyrical faculty? Whatever happens I must go on that there may be a man behind the lines already written; I cast the die long ago and must be true to the cast.

XXXIX

Two hours' idleness---because I have no excuse but to begin creative work, an intolerable toil. Little D--- F--- of Hyderabad told me that in her father's garden one met an opium-eater who made poems in his dreams and wrote the title-pages when he awoke but forgot the rest. He was the only happy poet.

XL

A couple of days ago I went to see Dr. F--- F---. He spoke of the attacks on both him and myself in Sinn Fein and of their untruthfulness. He said, 'I congratulated Edward Martyn some time ago on being leader of an important political party, and he answered, "I don't want to be, I want to do my own work". Says I, "I want to do my own work also", and then says he, "The worst of it is that those fellows would not leave either of us there for five minutes if they thought we liked it".'

XLI

The root of it all is that the political class in Ireland — the lower- middle class from whom the patriotic associations have drawn their journalists and their leaders for the last ten years — have suffered through the cultivation of hatred as the one energy of their movement, a deprivation which is the intellectual equivalent to a certain surgical operation. Hence the shrillness of their voices. They contemplate all creative power as the eunuchs contemplate Don Juan as he passes through Hell on the white horse.

XLII

To-night G--- said that he has always thought that the bad luck of Ireland comes from hatred being the foundation of our politics. It is possible that emotion is an evocation and in ways beyond the senses alters events---creating good and evil luck. Certain individuals who hate much seem to be followed by violent events outside their control. B--- G--- has been so followed always. It is possible to explain it by saying that hatred awakens hatred in others and in oneself a tendency to violent action; but there are times when there seems more than this---an actual stream of ill- luck. Certainly evocation with symbol has taught me that much that we think limited to certain obvious effects influences the whole being. A meditation on sunlight, for instance, affects the nature throughout, producing all the effects which follow from the symbolical nature of the sun. Hate must, in the same way, create sterility, producing many effects which would follow from meditation on a symbol. Such a symbol would produce not merely hate but associated effects. An emotion produces a symbol- --sensual emotion dreams of water, for instance---just as a symbol produces emotion. The symbol without emotion is more precise and, perhaps, more powerful than an emotion without symbol.

Hatred as a basis of imagination, in ways which one could explain even without magic, helps to dry up the nature and make the sexual abstinence, so common among young men and women in Ireland, possible. This abstinence reacts in its turn on the imagination, so that we get at last that strange eunuch-like tone and temper. For the last ten or twenty years there has been a perpetual drying of the Irish mind with the resultant dust-cloud.

XLIII

I saw Synge to-day and asked how much of his Deirdre was done. He said the third act was right, that he had put a grotesque character, a new

character, into the second act and intended to weave him into Act One. He was to come in with Conchubar, carrying some of his belongings, and afterwards at the end of the act to return for a forgotten knife---just enough to make it possible to use him in Act Two. He spoke of his work this winter doubtfully, thought it not very good, seemed only certain of the third act. I did not like to ask more questions lest he should understand that I wished to know if another could complete the work if he died. He is certainly too ill to work himself, and will be for a long time.

XLIV

Met MacDonagh [Note: Executed in 1916.] yesterday---a man with some literary faculty which will probably come to nothing through lack of culture and encouragement. He had just written an article for the Leader, and spoke much as I do myself of the destructiveness of journalism here in Ireland, and was apologetic about his article. He is managing a school on Irish and Gaelic League principles but says he is losing faith in the League. Its writers are infecting Irish not only with the English idiom but with the habits of thought of current Irish journalism, a most un-Celtic thing. 'The League', he said, 'is killing Celtic civilization.' I told him that Synge about ten years ago foretold this in an article in the Academy. He thought the National Movement practically dead, that the language would be revived but without all that he loved it for. In England this man would have become remarkable in some way, here he is being crushed by the mechanical logic and commonplace eloquence which give power to the most empty mind, because, being 'something other than human life', they have no use for distinguished feeling or individual thought. I mean that within his own

mind this mechanical thought is crushing as with an iron roller all that is organic.

XLV

The soul of Ireland has become a vapour and her body a stone.

XLVI

Ireland has grown sterile, because power has passed to men who lack the training which requires a certain amount of wealth to ensure continuity from generation to generation, and to free the mind in part from other tasks. A gentleman is a man whose principal ideas are not connected with his personal needs and his personal success. In old days he was a clerk or a noble, that is to say, he had freedom because of inherited wealth and position, or because of a personal renunciation. The names are different to-day, and I would put the artist and the scholar in the category of the clerk, yet personal renunciation is not now sufficient or the hysterica passio of Ireland would be inspiration, or perhaps it is sufficient but is impossible without inherited culture. For without culture or holiness, which are always the gift of a very few, a man may renounce wealth or any other external thing, but he cannot renounce hatred, envy, jealousy, revenge. Culture is the sanctity of the intellect.

XLVII

I have been talking of the literary element in painting with Miss E- -- G-- - and turning over the leaves of Binyon's book on Eastern Painting, in which he shows how traditional, how literary that is. The revolt against the

literary element in painting was accompanied by a similar revolt in poetry. The doctrine of what the younger Hallam called the Aesthetic School was expounded in his essay on Tennyson, and when I was a boy the unimportance of subject was a canon. A French poet had written of girls taking lice out of a child's hair. Henley was supposed to have founded a new modern art in the 'hospital poems', though he would not have claimed this. Hallam argued that poetry was the impression on the senses of certain very sensitive men. It was such with the pure artists, Keats and Shelley, but not so with the impure artists who, like Wordsworth, mixed up popular morality with their work. I now see that the literary element in painting, the moral element in poetry, are the means whereby the two arts are accepted into the social order and become a part of life and not things of the study and the exhibition. Supreme art is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned. The revolt of individualism came because the tradition had become degraded, or rather because a spurious copy had been accepted in its stead. Classical morality---not quite natural in Christianized Europe--- dominated this tradition at the Renaissance, and passed from Milton to Wordsworth and to Arnold, always growing more formal and empty until it became a vulgarity in our time---just as classical forms passed on from Raphael to the Academicians. But Anarchic revolt is coming to an end, and the arts are about to restate the traditional morality. A great work of art, the Ode to a Nightingale not less than the Ode to Duty, is as rooted in the early ages as the Mass which goes back to savage folk-lore. In what temple garden did the nightingale first sing?

XLVIII

No art can conquer the people alone---the people are conquered by an ideal of life upheld by authority. As this ideal is rediscovered, the arts, music and poetry, painting and literature, will draw closer together.

XLIX

The Abbey Theatre will fail to do its full work because there is no accepted authority to explain why the more difficult pleasure is the nobler pleasure. The fascination of the National Movement for me in my youth was, I think, that it seemed to promise such authority.

One cannot love a nation struggling to realize itself without an idea of that nation as a whole being present in our mind. One could always appeal to that idea in the mind of others. National spirit is, for the present, dying, because the influence of the Nation newspaper, which first gave popular expression to that idea in English, has passed away. Kincora, which should have certain poems and traditions to help it, and at its first production caused so much excitement, rouses now but slight interest, while H---'s plays grow more and more popular. H--- alone requires nothing but his own thought.

L

I cry continually against my life. I have sleepless nights, thinking of the time that I must take from poetry---last night I could not sleep---and yet, perhaps, I must do all these things that I may set myself into a life of action and express not the traditional poet but that forgotten thing, the normal active man.

LI

We require a new statement of moral doctrine, which shall be accepted by the average man, but be at the same time beyond his power in practice. Classical morality in its decay became an instrument in the hands of commonplace energy to overthrow distinguished men. A true system of morals is from the first a weapon in the hands of the most distinguished. The Catholic Church created a system only possible for saints, hence its prolonged power. Its definition of the good was narrow, but it did not set out to make shopkeepers. A lofty morality should be tolerant, for none declare its laws but those worn out with its warfare, and they must pity sinners. Besides, it must needs take a personal form in their minds and give to those minds the timidity of discoverers, not less than the courtesy of soldiers.

LII

A few days ago my sister Lolly dreamed that she saw three dead bodies on a bed. One had its face to the wall, one had a pink mask like a child's toy mask, and before she could look at the third, somebody put a mask on that too. While she was looking at them the body with its face to the wall suddenly moved. The same night J--- dreamed that she saw three very long funerals and that she saw what she thought a body on a bed. She thought it the body of a brother of hers who had died lately. She lay down on the bed by it, and it suddenly moved. The same night my sister Lily dreamed that she had received three telegrams.

LIII

There is a dying-out of national feeling very simple in its origin. You cannot keep the idea of a nation alive where there are no national institutions to reverence, no national success to admire, without a model of

it in the mind of the people. You can call it ‘Cathleen ni Houlihan’ or the ‘Shan van Voght’ in a mood of simple feeling, and love that image, but for the general purposes of life you must have a complex mass of images, something like an architect’s model. The Young Ireland poets created a mass of obvious images that filled the minds of the young---Wolfe Tone, King Brian, Emmet, Owen Roe, Sarsfield, the Fisherman of Kinsale---answered the traditional slanders on Irish character and entered so into the affections that it followed men on to the scaffold. The ethical ideas implied were of necessity very simple, needing neither study nor unusual gifts for their understanding. Our own movement thought to do the same thing in a more profound and therefore more enduring way. When I was twenty- five or twenty-six I planned a Legende des Siecles of Ireland that was to set out with my Wanderings of Oisin, and show something of every century. Lionel Johnson’s work and, later, Lady Gregory’s, carried on the dream in a different form; and I did not see, until Synge began to write, that we must renounce the deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City in the imagination, and express the individual. The Irish people were not educated enough to accept images more profound, more true to human nature, than the schoolboy thoughts of Young Ireland. You can only create a model of a race to inspire the action of that race as a whole, apart from exceptional individuals, when you and it share the same simple moral understanding of life. Milton and Shakespeare inspire the active life of England, but they do it through exceptional individuals. Having no understanding of life that we can teach to others, we must not seek to create a school. Could we create a vision of the race as noble as that of Sophocles and of Aeschylus, it would be attacked upon some trivial ground by minds that prefer Young Ireland rhetoric, or the obvious sentiment of popular English literature, a few Irish thoughts and feelings added for conscience’ sake.

Meanwhile, the need of a model of the nation, of some moral diagram, is as great as in the early nineteenth century, when national feeling was losing itself in a religious feud over tithes and emancipation. Neither the grammars of the Gaelic League nor the industrialism of the Leader, nor the Sinn Fein attacks upon the Irish Party, give sensible images to the affections. Yet in the work of Lady Gregory, of Synge, of O'Grady, of Lionel Johnson, in my own work, a school of journalists with simple moral ideas could find right building material to create a historical and literary nationalism as powerful as the old and nobler. That done, they could bid the people love and not hate.

LIV

Nobody running at full speed has either a head or a heart.

LV

I told my sister that I was to spend the night in the K--- Street haunted house. She said, 'O, I know about that house. I saw a furniture-van there one day and furniture going in, and ten days after, the house was empty again; and somebody I know was passing by in the early morning and saw an old woman on a window-sill, clinging to the sash. She was the caretaker. The ghost had driven her out and there was a policeman trying to get her down. But the pious Protestants say that there is no ghost or anything but the young novices in the Convent opposite "screaming in the night-time".'

THE END

The Death of Synge Extracts from a Diary Kept in 1909

I

Why does the struggle to come at truth take away our pity, and the struggle to overcome our passions restore it again?

II

National feeling could be roused again if some man of good education-if a Catholic, he should have been educated outside Ireland-gathered about him a few men like himself, and founded a new Nation newspaper, forbidding it all personal attacks, all arguments that assume a base motive in an opponent, and choosing for its national policy, not what seems most desirable in the abstract, but such policy as may stir the imagination and yet gather to its support the greatest possible number of educated men. Ireland is ruined by abstractions, and should prefer what may seem a worse policy if it gathers better men. So long as all is ordered for attack, and that alone, leaders will instinctively increase the number of enemies that they may give their followers something to do, and Irish enemies rather than English because they are the more easily injured. The greater the enemy, the greater the hatred, and therefore the greater seems the power. They would give a nation the frenzy of a sect. A sign that this method, powerful in the time of Parnell, no longer satisfies the nation is that parties are drifting into the hands of feebler and more ignorant men.

III

The education of our Irish secondary schools, especially the Catholic schools, substitutes pedantry for taste. Men learn the dates of writers, the external facts of masterpieces, and not sense of style or feeling for life. I have met no young man out of these schools who has not been injured by the literature and the literary history learned there. The arts have nothing to give but that joy of theirs which is the other side of sorrow, that exhausting contemplation: and in youth before habits have been formed---unless our teachers be wise men---we turn from it to pedantry, which opens to the mind a kind of sensual ease. The young Catholic men and women who have not been through the secondary schools are upon the other hand more imaginative than Protestant boys and girls of the same age. Catholic secondary education destroys, I think, much that the Catholic religion gives. Provincialism destroys the nobility of the Middle Ages.

IV

March 17.

As I go to and from my bedroom, here at Coole, I pass a wall covered with Augustus John's etchings and drawings. I notice a woman with strongly marked shoulder-blades and a big nose, and a pencil drawing called Epithalamium. In the Epithalamium an ungainly, ill-grown boy holds out his arms to a tall woman with thin shoulders and a large stomach. Near them is a vivid etching of a woman with the same large stomach and thin shoulders. There is not one of these fifty or sixty clerks and seamstresses and students that has not been broken by labour or wasted by sedentary life. A gymnast would find in all something to amend; and the better he mended the more would those bodies, as with the voice of Durer, declare that ancient canon discovered in the Greek gymnasium, which, whenever present in painting or sculpture, shows a compact between the artist and

society. John is not interested in the social need, in the perpetual thirst for greater health, but in character, in the revolt from all that makes one man like another. The old art, if carried to its logical conclusion, would have led to the creation of one single type of man, one single type of woman; gathering up by a kind of deification a capacity for all energy and all passion, into a Krishna, a Christ, a Dionysus; and at all times a poetical painter, a Botticelli, a Rossetti, creates as his supreme achievement one type of face, known afterwards by his name. The new art can create innumerable personalities, but in each of these the capacity for passion has been sacrificed to some habit of body or of mind. That woman with the big shoulder-blades has, for instance, a nature too keen, too clever for any passion, with the cleverness of people who cannot rest, and that young lad with his arms spread out will sink back into disillusionment and exhaustion after the brief pleasure of a passion which is in part curiosity. Some limiting environment or idiosyncrasy is displayed; man is studied as an individual fact, and not as that energy which seems measureless and hates all that is not itself. It is a powerful but prosaic art, celebrating the ‘fall into division’ not the ‘resurrection into unity’. Did not even Balzac, who looked at the world so often with similar eyes, find it necessary to deny character to his great ladies and young lovers that he might give them passion? What beautiful woman delights us by her look of character? That shows itself when beauty is gone, being the creation of habit, the bare stalk when the flower of spring has withered. Beauty consumes character with what Patmore calls ‘the integrity of fire’.

It is this lack of the capacity for passion which makes women dislike the schools of characterization, and makes the modern artist despise woman’s judgment. Women, for the same reason, dislike pure comedy. How few women like Moliere!

Here at Coole my room is hung with Arundel prints from Botticelli, Benozzo Gozzoli, Giorgione, Mantegna and the Van Eycks. Here everywhere is the expression of desire, though in the Van Eycks the new interest has begun. All display bodies to please an amorous woman's eyes or the eyes of a great King. The martyrs and saints even must show the capacity for all they have renounced.

V

These notes are morbid, but I heard a man of science say that all progress is at the outset pathological, and I write for my own good.

The pain others give passes away in their later kindness, but that of our own blunders, especially when they hurt our vanity, never passes away. Our own acts are isolated and one act does not buy absolution for another. They are always present before a strangely abstract judgment. We are never a unity, a personality to ourselves. Small acts of years ago are so painful in the memory that often we start at the presence a little below 'the threshold of consciousness' of a thought that remains unknown. It sheds a vague light like that of the moon before it rises, or after its setting. Vanity is so intimately associated with our spiritual identity that whatever hurts it, above all if it came from it, is more painful in the memory than serious sin, and yet I do not think it follows that we are very vain. The harm we do to others is lost in changing events and passes away and so is healed by time, unless it was very great. Looking back, I find only one offence which is as painful to me as a hurt to vanity. It was done to a man who died shortly after. Because of his death, it has not been touched by the transforming hand---tolerant Nature has not rescued it from Justice.

VI

I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed. We put on a grotesque or solemn painted face to hide us from the terrors of judgment, invent an imaginative Saturnalia where one forgets reality, a game like that of a child, where one loses the infinite pain of self-realization. Perhaps all the sins and energies of the world are but its flight from an infinite blinding beam.

VII

F--- is learning Gaelic. I would sooner see her in the Gaelic movement than in any Irish movement I can think of. I fear some new absorption in political opinion. Women, because the main event of their lives has been a giving themselves and giving birth, give all to an opinion as if it were some terrible stone doll. Men take up an opinion lightly and are easily false to it, and when faithful keep the habit of many interests. We still see the world, if we are of strong mind and body, with considerate eyes, but to women opinions become as their children or their sweethearts, and the greater their emotional capacity the more do they forget all other things. They grow cruel, as if in defence of lover or child, and all this is done for ‘something other than human life’. At last the opinion is so much identified with their nature that it seems a part of their flesh becomes stone and passes out of life. It was a part of F---’s power in the past that though she made this surrender with her mind, she kept the sweetness of her voice and much humour, and yet I am afraid. Women should have their play with dolls

finished in childish happiness, for if they play with them again it is amid hatred and malice.

VIII

Women should find in the mask enough joy to forget the doll without regret. There is always a living face behind the mask.

IX

Last night at ‘The Theatre of Ireland’ I talked to the man next to me. ‘I have been to your theatre also’, he said. ‘I like your popular plays, The Suburban Groove and those plays by the Frenchman, I do not remember his name’ (evidently Moliere), ‘but I don’t like your mysteries.’ I thought he meant something of mine, as the word ‘mystery’ is a popular reproach since The Shadowy Waters, but I found he meant Kincora. I said, ‘Why do you find that mysterious?’ He said, ‘O, I know nothing about all that history’. I replied, ‘When I was young every Irish Nationalist young man knew as much about King Brian as about Saint Patrick’. He thought I was talking of the peasants and said he was afraid that sort of knowledge was dying out amongst them. He evidently thought it their business alone, like the rath and the blessed well.

X

March 23.

MacDonagh called to-day. Very sad about Ireland. Says that he finds a barrier between himself and the Irish-speaking peasantry, who are ‘cold, dark and reticent’ and ‘too polite’. He watches the Irish-speaking boys at his school, and when nobody is looking, or when they are alone with the Irish-

speaking gardener, they are merry, clever and talkative. When they meet an English speaker or one who has learned Gaelic, they are stupid. They are in a different world. Presently he spoke of his nine years in a monastery and I asked what it was like. ‘O,’ he said, ‘everybody is very simple and happy enough. There is a little jealousy sometimes. If one brother goes into a town with a Superior, another brother is jealous.’ He then told me that the Bishop of Raphoe had forbidden anybody in his See to contribute to the Gaelic League because its Secretary ‘has blasphemed against the holy Adamnan’. The Secretary had said, ‘The Bishop is an enemy, like the founder of his See, Saint Adamnan, who tried to injure the Gaelic language by writing in Latin’. MacDonagh says, ‘Two old countrymen fell out and one said, “I have a brother who will make you behave”, meaning the Bishop of Raphoe, and the other said, “I have a son who will put sense into you”, meaning Cardinal Logue.’

XI

Molly Allgood came to-day to ask where I would be to-morrow, as Synge wishes to send for me if strong enough. He wants ‘to make arrangements’. He is dying. They have ceased to give him food.

Should we close the Abbey or keep it open while he still lives? Poor Molly is going through her work as always. Perhaps that is best for her. I feel Synge’s coming death less now than when he first became ill. I am used to the thought of it and I do not find that I pity him. I pity her. He is fading out of life. I felt the same when I saw M--- in the madhouse. I pitied his wife. He seemed already dead. One does not feel that death is evil when one meets it, — evil, I mean, for the one who dies. Our Daimon is silent as was that other before the death of Socrates. The wildest sorrow that comes at the thought of death is, I think, ‘Ages will pass over and no one ever again look

on that nobleness or that beauty'. What is this but to pity the living and to praise the dead?

XII

March 24.

Synge is dead. In the early morning he said to the nurse, 'It is no use fighting death any longer' and he turned over and died. I called at the hospital this afternoon and asked the assistant matron if he knew he was dying. She answered, 'He may have known it for weeks, but he would not have said so to anyone. He would have no fuss. He was like that.' She added, with emotion in her voice, 'We were devoted to him'.

XIII

March 28.

Mr. Stephens, Synge's brother-in-law, said he suffered no pain but only great weakness. On Sunday he questioned the doctor and convinced himself that he was dying. He told his brother-in-law next day and was quite cheerful, even making jokes. In the evening he saw Molly and told her to be brave and sent her to me that I might arrange about his writings. On the morning when I heard of his death a heavy storm was blowing and I doubt not when he died that it had well begun. That morning Lady Gregory felt a very great depression and was certain that some evil was coming, but feared for her grandchild, feared it was going to be ill. On the other hand, my sister Lolly said at breakfast, 'I think it will be all right with Synge, for last night I saw a galley struggling with a storm and then it shot into calm and bright sunlight and I heard the keel grate on the shore'. One remembers the voyages to Tir- nan-oge, certainly the voyages of souls after death to their place of peace.

XIV

I have been looking through his poems and have read once more that on page 21, ‘I asked if I got sick and died’. Certainly they were there at the funeral, his ‘idiot’ enemies: A--- who against all regulations rushed up to the dressing-rooms during the Playboy riot to tell the actors they should not have played in so disgraceful a play; B--- who has always used his considerable influence with the company against Synge, and has spoken against him in public; there, too, were the feeble friends who pretended to believe but gave no help. And there was C--- whose obituary notice speaks of Synge’s work as only important in promise, of the exaggeration of those who praise it, and then claims that its writer spent many hours a day with Synge in Paris (getting the date wrong by two years, however), with Synge who was proud and lonely, almost as proud of his old blood as of his genius, and had few friends. There was D---, the Secretary of the Society — it had sent a wreath---whose animosity had much to do with the attacks in Sinn Fein. It was, to quote E---, a funeral ‘small but select’. A good friend of Synge’s quoted to me:

How shall the ritual then be read, The requiem how be sung By you, by yours the evil eye, By yours the slanderous tongue, That did to death the innocence That died, and died so young?

Yet these men came, though but in remorse; they saw his plays, though but to dislike; they spoke his name, though but to slander. Well-to-do Ireland never saw his plays nor spoke his name. Was he ever asked to any country house but Coole? Was he ever asked to a dinner-party? How often I have wished that he might live long enough to enjoy that communion with idle, charming and cultivated women which Balzac in one of his dedications calls ‘the chief consolation of genius’!

XV

In Paris Synge once said to me, ‘We should unite stoicism, asceticism and ecstasy. Two of them have often come together, but the three never.’

XVI

I believe that some thing I said may have suggested ‘I asked if I got sick and died’. S--- had frequently attacked his work while admitting him a man of genius. He attacked it that he might remain on good terms with the people about him. When Synge was in hospital to be operated upon, S--- was there too as a patient, and I told Synge that whenever I spoke of his illness to any man that man said, ‘And isn’t it sad about S---?’ until I could stand it no longer and burst out with ‘I hope he will die’, and now, as someone said, I was ‘being abused all over the town as without heart’. I had learned that people were calling continually to inquire how S--- was, but hardly anybody called to ask for Synge. Two or three weeks later Synge wrote this poem. Had my words set his mind running on the thought that fools flourish, more especially as I had prophesied that S--- would flourish, and in my mood at the moment it seemed that for S--- to be operated on at the same time with Synge was a kind of insolence? S---’s illness did, indeed, win for him so much sympathy that he came out to lucrative and honourable employment, and now when playing golf he says with the English accent he has acquired of late, to some player who needs a great man’s favour, ‘I know him well, I will say a word in that quarter’.

The Irish weekly papers notice Synge’s death with short and for the most part grudging notices. There was an obscure Gaelic League singer who was a leader of the demonstration against the Playboy. He died on the same day.

Sinn Fein notices both deaths in the same article and gives three-fourths of it to the rioter. For Synge it has but grudging words, as was to be expected.

Molly tells me that Synge went to see Stephen MacKenna and his wife before going into hospital and said good-bye with ‘You will never see me again’.

CELEBRATIONS

1. — He was one of those unmoved souls in whom there is a perpetual ‘Last Day’, a perpetual trumpeting and coming up for judgment.

2. — He did not speak to men and women, asking judgment, as lesser writers do; but knowing himself part of judgment he was silent.

3. — We pity the living and not such dead as he. He has gone upward out of his ailing body into the heroical fountains. We are parched by time.

4. — He had the knowledge of his coming death and was cheerful to the end, even joking a little when that end had all but come. He had no need of our sympathies. It was as though we and the things about us died away from him and not he from us.

XVIII

DETRACTIONS

He had that egotism of the man of genius which Nietzsche compares to the egotism of a woman with child. Neither I nor Lady Gregory had ever a compliment from him. After Hyacinth Lady Gregory went home the moment the curtain fell, not waiting for the congratulation of friends, to get

his supper ready. He was always ailing and weakly. All he said of the triumphant Hyacinth was, ‘I expected to like it better.’ He had under charming and modest manners, in almost all things of life, a complete absorption in his own dream. I have never heard him praise any writer, living or dead, but some old French farce-writer. For him nothing existed but his thought. He claimed nothing for it aloud. He never said any of those self-confident things I am enraged into saying, but one knew that he valued nothing else. He was too confident for self- assertion. I once said to George Moore, ‘Synge has always the better of you, for you have brief but ghastly moments during which you admit the existence of other writers; Synge never has.’ I do not think he disliked other writers---they did not exist. One did not think of him as an egotist. He was too sympathetic in the ordinary affairs of life and too simple. In the arts he knew no language but his own.

I have often envied him his absorption as I have envied Verlaine his vice. Can a man of genius make that complete renunciation of the world necessary to the full expression of himself without some vice or some deficiency? You were happy or at least blessed, ‘blind old man of Scio’s rocky isle’.

XIX

Two plays last night, Time, a play of suggestion, Cross-roads, a logical play. We accepted this last play because of its central idea, a seeming superstition of its creator, a promise of a new attitude towards life, of something beyond logic. In the four morning papers Time is cursed or ignored and Cross-roads given great praise, but praise that is never for the central idea, and the only critic who speaks of that idea misunderstands it completely. State a logical proposition and the most commonplace mind can complete it. Suggestion is richest to the richest and so grows unpopular with

a democracy like this. They misunderstood Robinson's idea, luckily for his popularity, and so turned all into commonplace. They allow their minds to dwell so completely on the logic that they do not notice what, as it were, swims upon it or juts up from its river-bed. That is how they combine religion with a journalism which accepts all the implications of materialism. A thought that stirs me in Time is that 'only women and great artists love time, others sell it', but what is Blake's 'naked beauty displayed', visible audible wisdom, to the shopkeeping logicians?

How can they love time or anything but the day's end?

XX

To-day Molly told me that Synge often spoke of his coming death, indeed constantly for a year past, and tried hard to finish Deirdre. Sometimes he would get very despondent, thinking he could not finish it, and then she would act it for him and he would write a little more, and then he would despond again, and so the acting would begin again.

My sister Lily says that the ship Lolly saw on the night of Synge's death was not like a real ship, but like the Shadowy Waters ship on the Abbey stage, a sort of allegorical thing. There was also a girl in a bright dress, but she seemed to vanish as the ship ran ashore; all about the girl, and indeed everything, was broken and confused until the bow touched the shore in bright sunlight.

XXI

I see that between Time, suggestion, and Cross-roads, logic, lies a difference of civilization. The literature of suggestion belongs to a social order when life conquered by being itself and the most living was the most powerful, and not to a social order founded upon argument. Leisure, wealth,

privilege were created to be a soil for the most living. The literature of logic, the most powerful and the most empty, conquering all in the service of one metallic premise, is for those who have forgotten everything but books and yet have only just learnt to read. They fill their minds with deductions, as they fill their empty houses, where there is nothing of the past, with machine-made furniture. I used to think that the French and Irish democracies follow, as John O'Leary used to say, a logical deduction to its end, no matter what suffering it brings, from a resemblance in the blood. I now believe that they do this because they have broken from the past, from the self-evident truths, from 'naked beauty displayed'. The English logicians maybe as ignorant but they are timid.

Robinson should become a celebrated dramatist if this theatre lasts long enough. He does not argue like the imitators of Ibsen, though his expression of life is as logical, hence his grasp on active passion. Passion is logical when bent on action. In the drama of suggestion there must be sufficient loosening and slackening for meditation and the seemingly irrelevant, or else a Greek chorus, and neither is possible without rich leisurely minds in the audience, lovers of Father Time, men who understand Faust's last cry to the passing moment.

Florence Farr once said to me, 'If we could say to ourselves, with sincerity, "This passing moment is as good as any I shall ever know", we would die upon the instant, or be united to God'. Desire would have ceased, and logic the feet of desire.

XXII

April 5.

Walked home from Gurteen Dhas with D--- and walked through the brick-kilns of Egypt. He states everything in a slightly argumentative form

and the soul is starved by the absence of self- evident truth. Good conversation unrolls itself like the spring or like the dawn; whereas effective argument, mere logical statement, founds itself on the set of facts or of experiences common to two or more. Each hides what is new or rich.

XXIII

The element which in men of action corresponds to style in literature is the moral element. Books live almost entirely because of their style, and the men of action who inspire movements after they are dead are those whose hold upon impersonal emotion and law lifts them out of immediate circumstance. Mitchel wrote better prose than Davis, Mangan better poetry, D'Arcy Magee better popular verse, Fintan Lalor saw deeper into a political event, O'Connell had more power and Meagher more eloquence, but Davis alone has influenced generations of young men, though Mitchel's narrower and more faulty nature has now and again competed with him. Davis showed this moral element not merely in his verse--- I doubt if that could have had great effect alone---but in his action, in his defence, for instance, of the rights of his political opponents of the Royal Irish Academy. His verses were but an illustration of principles shown in action. Men are dominated by self-conquest; thought that is a little obvious or platitudinous if merely written, becomes persuasive, immortal even, if held to amid the hurry of events. The self-conquest of the writer who is not a man of action is style.

Mitchel's influence comes mainly, though not altogether, from style, that also a form of power, an energy of life. It is curious that Mitchel's long martyred life, supported by style, has had less force than that of a man who died at thirty, was never in the hulks, did not write very well, and achieved no change of the law.

The act of appreciation of any great thing is an act of self- conquest. This is one reason why we distrust the serene moralist who has not approved his principles in some crisis. He would be troubled, broken even, if he had made that conquest. Yet the man who has proved himself in a crisis may be serene in words, for his battle was not in contemplation where words are combatants.

XXIV

Last night my sister told me that this book of Synge's (his poems) was the only book they began to print on a Friday. They tried to avoid this but could not, and it is not at all well printed. Do all they could, it would not come right.

XXV

Molly Allgood has just told me of three pre-visions. Some years ago, when the company were in England on that six weeks' tour, she, Synge and D--- were sitting in a tea-shop, she was looking at Synge, and suddenly the flesh seemed to fall from his face and she saw but a skull. She told him this and it gave him a great shock, and since then she had not allowed images to form before her eyes of themselves, as they often used to do. Synge was well at the time. Again last year, but before the operation and at a time when she had no fear, she dreamed that she saw him in a coffin being lowered into a grave, and a 'strange sort of cross' was laid over the coffin. (The company sent a cross of flowers to his funeral and it was laid upon the grave.) She told this also to Synge and he was troubled by it. Then some time after the operation she dreamed that she saw him in a boat. She was on the shore, and he waved his hand to her and the boat went away. She longed to go to him but could not.

XXVI

March 11, **Stratford-on-Avon.**

Some weeks ago C--- wrote to me that it was a phase of M---'s madness to believe himself in heaven. All the great poets of other times were there, and he was helping to prepare for the reception of Swinburne. The angels were to stand in groups of three. And now I have just heard that Swinburne is dead.

XXVII

Dined with Ricketts and Shannon. Ricketts spoke of the grief Synge's death gave him---the ending of all that work. We talked of the disordered and broken lives of modern men of genius and the so different lives of the Italian painters. He said in those days men of genius were cared for, but now the strain of life is too heavy, no one thinks of them till some misfortune comes---madness or death. He then spoke, as he often does, of the lack of any necessary place for the arts in modern life and said, 'After all, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was the Pope's ceiling'. Later he said in comment upon some irascible act of Hugh Lane's, 'Everybody who is doing anything for the world is very disagreeable, the agreeable people are those for whom the world is doing something'.

XXVIII

Our modern public arts, architecture, plays, large decorations, have too many different tastes to please. Some taste is sure to dislike and to speak its dislike everywhere, and then because of the silence of the rest---partly from

apathy, partly from dislike of controversy, partly from the difficulty of defence, as compared with the ease of attack — there is general timidity. All creation requires one mind to make and one mind of enjoyment. The theatre can at rare moments create this one mind of enjoyment, and once created, it is like the mind of an individual in solitude, immeasurably bold---all is possible to it. The only building received with enthusiasm during my time has been the Catholic Cathedral of Westminster---religion or the politics of religion created that one mind.

XXIX

I asked Molly if any words of hers made Synge write 'I asked if I got sick and died' and she said, 'He used often to joke about death with me and one day he said, "Will you go to my funeral?" and I said, "No, for I could not bear to see you dead and the others living".'

XXX

Went to S---'s the other night---everybody either too tall or too short, crooked or lop-sided. One woman had an excited voice, an intellect without self-possession, and there was a man with a look of a wood-kern, who kept bringing the conversation back and back to Synge's wrongdoing in having made a girl in the Playboy admire a man who had hamstrung 'mountain ewes'. He saw nothing else to object to but that one thing. He declared that the English would not give Home Rule because they thought Ireland cruel, and no Irishman should write a sentence to make them go on thinking that. There arose before my mind an image of this man arguing about Ireland with an endless procession of second-rate men. At last I said, 'When a country produces a man of genius he never is what it wants or believes it wants; he is always unlike its idea of itself. In the eighteenth century

Scotland believed itself religious, moral and gloomy, and its national poet Burns came not to speak of these things but to speak of lust and drink and drunken gaiety. Ireland, since the Young Irelanders, has given itself up to apologetics. Every impression of life or impulse of imagination has been examined to see if it helped or hurt the glory of Ireland or the political claim of Ireland. A sincere impression of life became at last impossible, all was apologetics. There was no longer an impartial imagination, delighting in whatever is naturally exciting. Synge was the rushing up of the buried fire, an explosion of all that had been denied or refused, a furious impartiality, an indifferent turbulent sorrow. His work, like that of Burns, was to say all the people did not want to have said. He was able to do this because Nature had made him incapable of a political idea.' The wood-kern made no answer, did not understand a word I said, perhaps; but for the rest of the evening he kept saying to this person or to that person that he objected to nothing but the passage about the 'mountain ewes'.

XXXI

July 8.

I dreamed this thought two nights ago: 'Why should we complain if men ill-treat our Muses, when all that they gave to Helen while she still lived was a song and a jest?'

XXXII

September 20.

An idle man has no thought, a man's work thinks through him. On the other hand a woman gets her thought through the influence of a man. A man is to her what work is to a man. Man is a woman to his work and it begets his thoughts.

XXXIII

The old playwrights took old subjects, did not even arrange the subject in a new way. They were absorbed in expression, that is to say in what is most near and delicate. The new playwrights invent their subjects and dislike anything customary in the arrangement of the fable, but their expression is as common as the newspapers where they first learned to write.

XXXIV

October.

I saw Hamlet on Saturday night, except for the chief ‘Ophelia’ scenes, and missed these (for I had to be in the Abbey) without regret. Their pathos, as they are played, has always left me cold. I came back for Hamlet at the graveside: there my delight always begins anew. I feel in Hamlet, as so often in Shakespeare, that I am in the presence of a soul lingering on the storm-beaten threshold of sanctity. Has not that threshold always been terrible, even crime-haunted? Surely Shakespeare, in those last seeming idle years, was no quiet country gentleman, enjoying, as men like Dowden think, the temporal reward of an unvalued toil. Perhaps he sought for wisdom in itself at last, and not in its passionate shadows. Maybe he had passed the threshold, and none the less for Jonson’s drinking bout. Certainly one finds here and there in his work praise of country leisure sweetened by wisdom.

XXXV

Am I going against nature in my constant attempt to fill my life with work? Is my mind as rich as in idle days? Is not perhaps the poet’s labour a

mere rejection? If he seek purity---the ridding of his life of all but poetry---will not inspiration come? Can one reach God by toil? He gives Himself to the pure in heart. He asks nothing but attention.

XXXVI

I have been looking at Venetian costumes of the sixteenth century as pictured in The Mask — all fantastic; bodily form hidden or disguised; the women with long bodices, the men in stuffed doublets. Life had become so learned and courtly that men and women dressed with no thought of bodily activity. If they still fought and hunted, their imagination was not with these things. Does not the same happen to our passions when we grow contemplative and so liberate them from use? They also become fantastic and create the strange lives of poets and artists.

December 15.

Deirdre of the Sorrows (first performances). I was anxious about this play and on Thursday both Lady Gregory and I felt the strain of our doubts and fears. Would it seem mere disjointed monotony? Would the second act be intelligible? The audience seemed to like it, and I was greatly moved by certain passages in the last act. I thought the quarrel at the graveside with its last phrase, ‘And isn’t it a poor thing we should miss the safety of the grave, and we trampling its edge?’ and Deirdre’s cry to the quarrelling Kings, ‘Draw a little back with the squabbling of fools’, as noble and profound drama as any man has written. On the first night the thought that it was Synge’s reverie over death, his own death, made all poignant. ‘The filth of the grave’, ‘death is a poor, untidy thing, though it’s a queen that dies’, and the like, brought him dying before me. I remembered his extreme gentleness in the last weeks, that air of being done with ambition and conflict. Last night the audience was small---under ten pounds---and less

alive than the first night. No one spoke of the great passages. Someone thought the quarrel in the last act too harsh. Others picked out those rough peasant words that give salt to his speech, as ‘of course adding nothing to the dialogue, and very ugly’. Others objected to the little things in the costuming of the play which were intended to echo these words, to vary the heroic convention with something homely or of the fields. Then as I watched the acting I saw that O’Donovan and Molly (Maire O’Neill) were as passionless as the rest. Molly had personal charm, pathos, distinction even, fancy, beauty, but never passion---never intensity; nothing out of a brooding mind All was but observation, curiosity, desire to please. Her foot never touched the unchanging rock, the secret place beyond life; her talent showed like that of the others, social, modern, a faculty of comedy. Pathos she has, the nearest to tragedy the comedian can come, for that is conscious of our presence and would have our pity. Passion she has not, for that looks beyond mankind and asks no pity, not even of God. It realizes, substantiates, attains, scorns, governs, and is most mighty when it passes from our sight.

XXXVIII

December 16.

Last night Molly had so much improved that I thought she may have tragic power. The lack of power and of clarity which I still find amid great charm and distinction, comes more from lack of construction, through lack of reflection and experience, than from mere lack of emotion. There are passages where she attempts nothing, or where she allows herself little external comedy impulses, more, I now think, because they are habitual than because she could not bring emotion out of herself. The chief failure is towards the end. She does not show immediately after the death of Naoise

enough sense of what has happened, enough normal despair to permit of a gradual development into the wild unearthly feeling of the last speeches, though these last speeches are exquisitely spoken. My unfavourable impression of Friday came in part from the audience, which was heavy and, I thought, bored. Yesterday the audience---the pit entirely full---was enthusiastic and moved, raising once again my hope for the theatre and for the movement.

XXXIX

May 25.

At Stratford-on-Avon the Playboy shocked a good many people, because it was a self-improving, self-educating audience, and that means a perverted and commonplace audience. If you set out to educate yourself you are compelled to have an ideal, a model of what you would be; and if you are not a man of genius, your model will be commonplace and prevent the natural impulses of the mind, its natural reverence, desire, hope, admiration, always half unconscious, almost bodily. That is why a simple round of religious duties, things that escape the intellect, is often so much better than its substitute, self-improvement.

XL

September 18, S.S. ‘Zeeland’.

I noticed in the train, as I came to Queenstown, a silent, fairly well-dressed man, who struck me as vulgar. It was not his face, which was quite normal, but his movements. He moved from his head only. His arm and hand, let us say, moved in direct obedience to the head, had not the instinctive motion that comes from a feeling of weight, of the shape of an

object to be touched or grasped. There were too many straight lines in gesture and in pose. The result was an impression of vulgar smartness, a defiance of what is profound and old and simple. I have noticed that beginners sometimes move this way on the stage. They, if told to pick up something, show by the movement of their body that their idea of doing it is more vivid than the doing of it. One gets an impression of thinness in the nature. I am watching Miss V--- to find out if her inanimate movements when on the stage come from lack of experience or if she has them in life. I watched her sinking into a chair the other day to see if her body felt the size and shape of the chair before she reached it. If her body does not so feel she will never be able to act, just as she will never have grace of movement in ordinary life. As I write I see through the cabin door a woman feeding a child with a spoon. She thinks of nothing but the child, and every movement is full of expression. It would be beautiful acting. Upon the other hand her talk---she is talking to someone next her---in which she is not interested, is monotonous and thin in cadence. It is a mere purpose in the brain, made necessary by politeness.

XLI

October.

A good writer should be so simple that he has no faults, only sins.

THE END

The Bounty of Sweden

I

Thirty years ago I visited Paris for the first time. The Cabbalist MacGregor Mathers said, ‘Write your impressions at once, for you will never see Paris clearly again’. I can remember that I had pleased him by certain deductions from the way a woman at the other end of the cafe moved her hands over the dominoes. I might have seen that woman in London or in Dublin, but it would not have occurred to me to discover in her every kind of rapacity, the substance of the legendary harpy. ‘Is not style’, as Synge once said to me, ‘born out of the shock of new material?’

I am about to write, as in a kind of diary, impressions of Stockholm which must get whatever value they have from excitement, from the presence before the eyes of what is strange, mobile and disconnected.

II

Early in November a journalist called to show me a printed paragraph saying that the Nobel Prize would probably be conferred upon Herr Mann, the distinguished novelist, or upon myself. I did not know that the Swedish Academy had ever heard my name; tried to escape an interview by talking of Rabindranath Tagore, of his gift to his School of the seven thousand pounds awarded him; almost succeeded in dismissing the whole Reuter paragraph from my memory. Herr Mann has many readers, is a famous novelist with his fixed place in the world, and, said I to myself, well fitted for such an honour; whereas I am but a writer of plays which are acted by players with a literary mind for a few evenings, and I have altered them so

many times that I doubt the value of every passage. I am more confident of my lyrics, or of some few amongst them, but then I have got into the habit of recommending or commending myself to general company for anything rather than my gift of lyric writing, which concerns such a meagre troop.

Every now and then, when something has stirred my imagination, I begin talking to myself. I speak in my own person and dramatize myself, very much as I have seen a mad old woman do upon the Dublin quays, and sometimes detect myself speaking and moving as if I were still young, or walking perhaps like an old man with fumbling steps. Occasionally, I write out what I have said in verse, and generally for no better reason than because I remember that I have written no verse for a long time. I do not think of my soliloquies as having different literary qualities. They stir my interest, by their appropriateness to the men I imagine myself to be, or by their accurate description of some emotional circumstance, more than by any aesthetic value. When I begin to write I have no object but to find for them some natural speech, rhythm and syntax, and to set it out in some pattern, so seeming old that it may seem all men's speech, and though the labour is very great, I seem to have used no faculty peculiar to myself, certainly no special gift. I print the poem and never hear about it again, until I find the book years after with a page dogeared by some young man, or marked by some young girl with a violet, and when I have seen that, I am a little ashamed, as though somebody were to attribute to me a delicacy of feeling I should but do not possess. What came so easily at first, and amidst so much drama, and was written so laboriously at the last, cannot be counted among my possessions.

On the other hand, if I give a successful lecture, or write a vigorous, critical essay, there is immediate effect; I am confident that on some one

point, which seems to me of great importance, I know more than other men, and I covet honour.

III

Then some eight days later, between ten and eleven at night, comes a telephone message from the Irish Times saying that the prize has indeed been conferred upon me; and some ten minutes after that comes a telegram from the Swedish Ambassador; then journalists come for interviews. At half past twelve my wife and I are alone, and search the cellar for a bottle of wine, but it is empty, and as a celebration is necessary we cook sausages. A couple of days pass and a letter from the Ambassador invites me to receive the prize at Stockholm, but a letter from the Swedish Academy offers to send medal, money, and diploma to Dublin.

I question booksellers in vain for some history of Sweden, or of Swedish literature. Even Gosse's Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe, which I read twenty years ago, is out of print, and among my own books there is nothing but the Life of Swedenborg, which contains photographs of Swedenborg's garden and garden-house, and of the Stockholm House of Nobles, built in Dutch style, and beautiful, with an ornament that never insists upon itself, and a dignity that has no pomp. It had housed in Swedenborg's day that Upper Chamber of the Swedish Parliament where he had voted and spoken upon finance, after the ennoblement of his family.

IV

My wife and I leave Harwich for Esbjerg in Denmark, on the night of December 6, and find our alarms were needless, for the sea is still and the air warm. The Danish steamboat is about the size of the Dublin-Holyhead mail-boat, but the cabins are panelled in pale birchwood, and when we sit

down to supper, the table is covered by an astonishing variety of cold food, most of which we refuse because we do not recognize it, and some, such as eels in jelly, because we do. Our companions are commercial travellers and presently we are recognized, for somebody has a newspaper with my portrait, and a man who has travelled in Ireland for an exporter of Danish agricultural machinery talks to us at dinner. He was in Munster for the first part of our Civil War, and when the trains were stopped had found himself in great difficulties, and during parts of his journey had moved at breakneck speed, that his motor might escape capture by the Insurgents, but our Civil War was no part of his business, and had not stirred his imagination. He had, however, discovered a defect in Irish agriculture that was very much a part. Through lack of warm winter sheds and proper winter food for cattle, the Irish farmers had no winter butter, and so Ireland must import butter from his country. Though, as he said, against Danish interests, he had pointed this out to Irish farmers. 'But you have a Government', they said, 'which looks after these things', and this time he became really excited---'Put that idea out of your head', I told them. 'It was we ourselves who looked after these things, our Government has nothing to do with it.'

He asks why the Irish have so little self-reliance, and want the Government to do everything, and I say, 'Were the Danes always self-reliant?' and after a moment's thought, he answers, 'Not till the Bishop established his Schools; we owe everything to his High Schools'. I know something of Bishop Grundtvig and his Schools, for I often hear A. E. or some other at Plunkett House tell how he educated Denmark, by making examinations almost nothing and the personality of the teacher almost everything, and rousing the imagination with Danish literature and history. 'What our peasants need', he had said, 'is not technical training, but mental.'

As we draw near our journey's end, an elderly Swede comes to say 'good-bye', and kisses my wife's hand, bending very low, and the moment he is out of ear-shot, the Danish commercial traveller says with a disgusted voice, 'No Dane would do that. The Swedes are always imitating the French.'

I see that he does not like Swedes, and I ask what he thinks of Norwegians. 'Rough,' he says, 'and they want everything, they want Greenland now.'

V

At Esbjerg I find a young man, a distinguished Danish poet sent by a Copenhagen newspaper, and he and I and my wife dine together. At Copenhagen journalists meet us at the railway station, and others at the hotel, and when I am asked about Ireland I answer always that if the British Empire becomes a voluntary Federation of Free Nations, all will be well, but if it remains as in the past, a domination of one, the Irish question is not settled. That done with, I can talk of the work of my generation in Ireland, the creation of a literature to express national character and feeling but with no deliberate political aim. A journalist who has lived in Finland says, 'Finland has had to struggle with Russian influence to preserve its national culture'. I ask many questions and one journalist says, 'O-- -Denmark is well educated, and education can reach everybody, as education cannot in big nations like England and America', and he goes on to say that in Denmark 'you may dine at some professor's house, and find that you are sitting next your housemaid, who is among his favourite pupils, and next morning she will be your housemaid again, and too well educated to presume, or step out of her place'. Another, however, a very distinguished man, will have it that it is 'all wrong, for people who should hardly know

what a book is now read books, and even write them. The High Schools have made the intellect of Denmark sentimental.' A little later on he says, 'We may have a Socialist Government one of these days', and I begin to wonder what Denmark will make of that mechanical eighteenth-century dream; we know what half- mediaeval Russia has made of it. Another Dane speaks of the Danish Royal Family as 'bourgeois and sporting, like the English'; but says, when I ask about the Royal Family of Sweden, 'O--- such educated and intelligent people'. It is he, I think, who first tells me of Prince Eugene, friend and patron of Swedish artists, and himself an accomplished painter who has helped to decorate the Stockholm Town Hall, 'beginning every day at nine o'clock, and working all day like the rest, and for two years', and how at the opening ceremony he had not stood among the Royal Family, 'but among the artists and workmen', and that it was he who saw to it 'that every artist was given freedom to create as he would'. Another spoke much of Strindberg, and though he called him the 'Shakespeare of Sweden', seemed to approve the Swedish Academy's refusal of recognition; 'they could not endure his quarrels with his friends nor the book about his first wife'.

A train-ferry brings us across some eighteen miles of sea, and so into Sweden, and while we are waiting for the train to start again, I see through a carriage window many faces, but it is only just as the train starts, when a Swedish interviewer says---for there are interviewers here also---'Did you not see all those people gazing at the Nobel Prize winner?', that I connect those faces with myself.

Away from the lights of the station it is too dark to see anything, but when the dawn breaks, we are passing through a forest.

VI

At the Stockholm station a man introduces himself, and reminds me that I met him in Paris thirty years ago, and asks me to read a pamphlet which he has written in English upon Strindberg, and especially a chapter called ‘Strindberg and the Wolves’. The pamphlet comes to the hotel a couple of hours later, and turns out to be an attack upon the Swedish Academy, and an ardent defence of Strindberg. That outrageous, powerful book about his first wife is excused on the ground that it was not written for publication, and was published by an accident. And somebody once met Strindberg in a museum, dressed up according to the taste of one or other of his wives, ‘with cuffs upon his pantaloons’, by which the pamphlet meant, I imagine, that like ‘Mr. Prufrock’ he wore ‘the bottoms of his trousers rolled’. I had met its writer in the rooms of an American artist, who was of Strindberg’s Paris circle, and it was probably there that I had heard for the first time of stage scenery that might decorate a stage and suggest a scene, while attempting nothing that an easel painting can do better. I am pleased to imagine that the news of it may have come from Strindberg, whom I seem to remember as big and silent. I have always felt a sympathy for that tortured, self-torturing man who offered himself to his own soul as Buddha offered himself to the famished tiger. He and his circle were preoccupied with the deepest problems of mankind. He himself, at the time I speak of, was seeking with furnace and athanor for the philosophers’ stone.

At my hotel, I find a letter from another of that circle, whom I remember as a fair girl like a willow, beginning with this sentence- --’God’s blessing be upon your wife and upon yourself through the many holy men and women of this land’.

VII

The diplomas and medals are to be given us by the King at five in the afternoon of December 10th.

The American Ambassador, who is to receive those for an American man of science, unable to be present, and half a dozen men of various nations sit upon the platform. In the body of the Hall every seat is full, and all there are in evening dress, and in the front row are the King, Princess Ingeborg, wife of the King's brother, Prince Wilhelm, Princess Margaretha, and I think another Royalty. The President of the Swedish Academy speaks in English, and I see from the way he stands, from his self-possession, and from his rhythmical utterance, that he is an experienced orator. I study the face of the old King, intelligent and friendly, like some country gentleman who can quote Horace and Catullus, and the face of the Princess Margaretha, full of subtle beauty, emotional and precise, and impassive with a still intensity suggesting that final consummate strength which rounds the spiral of a shell. One finds a similar beauty in wooden busts taken from Egyptian tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and not again till Gainsborough paints. Is it very ancient and very modern alone or did painters and sculptors cease to notice it until our day?

The Ambassador goes towards the King, descends from the platform by some five or six steps, which end a yard from the King's feet, and having received the diploma and medal, ascends those five or six steps walking backward. He does not go completely backward, but sideways, and seems to show great practice. Then there is music, and a man of science repeats the movement, imitating the Ambassador exactly and easily, for he is young and agile, and then more music, and two men of science go down the steps, side by side, for they have made discoveries that are related to one another, and the prize is divided between them. As it would be impossible for two men to go up backward, side by side, without much practice, one repeats

the slanting movement, and the other turns his back on Royalty. Then the British Ambassador receives diploma and medal for two Canadians, but as he came from the body of the hall he has no steps to go up and down. Then more music and my turn comes. When the King has given me my diploma and medal and said, 'I thank you for coming yourself', and I have bowed my thanks, I glance for a moment at the face of the Princess Margaretha, and move backward towards the stair. As I am about to step sideways like the others, I notice that the carpet is not nailed down, and this suddenly concentrates my attention upon the parallel lines made by the two edges of the carpet, and, as though I were hypnotized, I feel that I must move between them, and so straight up backward without any sidelong movement. It seems to me that I am a long time reaching the top, and as the cheering grows much louder when I get there, I must have roused the sympathy of the audience. All is over, and I am able to examine my medal, its charming, decorative, academic design, French in manner, a work of the 'nineties. It shows a young man listening to a Muse, who stands young and beautiful with a great lyre in her hand, and I think as I examine it,' I was good- looking once like that young man, but my unpractised verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were; and now I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she is like those Angels in Swedenborg's vision, and moves perpetually "towards the day-spring of her youth".' At night there is a banquet, and when my turn comes, I speak of Swedenborg, Strindberg, and Ibsen. Then a very beautiful, stately woman introduces herself with this sentence, spoken slowly as though English were unfamiliar, 'What is this new religion they are making up in Paris that is all about the dead?' I wonder who has told her that I know anything of psychical research, for it must be of that she speaks, and I tell her of my own studies. We are going to change the thought of the

world, I say, to bring it back to all its old truths, but I dread the future. Think what the people have made of the political thought of the eighteenth century, and now we must offer them a new fanaticism. Then I stop ashamed, for I am talking habitual thoughts, and not adapting them to her ear, forgetting beauty in the pursuit of truth, and I wonder if age has made my mind rigid and heavy. I deliberately falter as though I could think of nothing more to say, that she may pass upon her smiling road.

VIII

Next day is the entrance of the new Crown Princess, and my wife and I watch it, now from the hotel window, now from the quayside. Stockholm is almost as much channelled by the sea as Venice; and with an architecture as impressive as that of Paris, or of London, it has the better even of Paris in situation. It seems to shelter itself under the walls of a great Palace, begun at the end of the seventeenth century. We come very slowly to realize that this building may deserve its great architectural reputation. The windows, the details of the ornaments, are in a style that has spread everywhere, and I cannot escape from memories of houses at Queen's Gate, and even, it may be, from that of the Ulster Bank at Sligo, which I have hardly seen since my childhood. Was it not indeed a glory and shame of that architecture that we have been able to combine its elements in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of purposes, as if they had come out of a child's box of wooden bricks? Among all these irrelevant associations, however, I discover at last a vast, dominating, unconfused outline, a masterful simplicity. The Palace is at the other side of the river, and away towards our left runs the river bordered by tall buildings, and above the roofs of the houses, towards our right, rises the tower of the new Town Hall, the glittering pole upon its top sustaining the three crowns of the Swedish Arms. Copenhagen is an anarchy of

commercial streets, with fine buildings here and there, but here all seems premeditated and arranged.

Everywhere there are poles with flags, and at the moment when the Crown Prince and Princess leave the railway station for the Palace, the salvoes of artillery begin. After every salvo there are echoes, and I feel a quickening of the pulse, an instinctive alarm. I remember firing in Dublin last winter, the sudden noise that drew like echoes from the streets. I have to remind myself that these cannon are fired out of gaiety and goodwill. There are great crowds, and I get the impression of a family surrounded by loyalty and affection.

The next night there is a reception at the Palace, and the Nobel Prize winners are among the guests. We wait in a long gallery for our turn to enter the throne-room, and upon the black coats of the civilians, as upon the grey and silver of the Guards, lie the chains of the three Swedish Orders. Among the black-coated men are men of learning, men of letters, men of science, much of the intellect of Sweden. What model has made all this, one wonders: Goethe's Weimar, or Sweden's own eighteenth-century Courts? There may be, must be, faults of commission or omission, but where else could a like assembly be gathered? I who have never seen a Court, find myself before the evening is ended moved as if by some religious ceremony, though to a different end, for here it is Life herself that is praised. Presently we walk through lines of sentries, in the costume of Charles XII., the last of Sweden's great military Kings, and then bow as we pass rapidly before the tall seated figures of the Royal Family. They seem to be like stage royalties. Just such handsome men and women would have been chosen by a London manager staging, let us say, some dramatized version of The Prisoner of Zenda. One has a general impression of youthful distinction, even the tall, slight figure of the old King seems young. Then

we pass from the throne-room into a vast hall hung with Gobelins tapestries, which seem in the distance to represent scenes like those in a Watteau or in a Fragonard. Their green colour by contrast turns the marble pillars above into a dusky silver. At the end of the hall musicians are sitting in a high marble gallery, and in the side galleries are women in white dresses, many very young and handsome. Others upon the level of the floor sit grouped together, making patches of white among the brilliant uniforms and the black coats. We are shepherded to our places, and the musicians play much Swedish music, which I cannot describe, for I know nothing of music. During our first long wait all kinds of pictures had passed before me in reverie and now my imagination renews its excitement. I had thought how we Irish had served famous men and famous families, and had been, so long as our nation had intellect enough to shape anything of itself, good lovers of women, but had never served any abstract cause, except the one, and that we personified by a woman, and I wondered if the service of woman could be so different from that of a Court. I had thought how, before the emigration of our poor began, our gentlemen had gone all over Europe, offering their swords at every Court, and that many had stood, just as I, but with an anxiety I could but imagine, for their future hung upon a frown or a smile. I had run through old family fables and histories, to find if any man of my blood had so stood, and had thought that there were men living, meant by nature for that vicissitude, who had served a woman through all folly, because they had found no Court to serve. Then my memory had gone back twenty years to that summer when a friend read out to me at the end of each day's work Castiglione's commendations and descriptions of that Court of Urbino where youth for certain brief years imposed upon drowsy learning the discipline of its joy, and I remembered a cry of Bembo's made years after, 'Would that I were a shepherd that I might look down daily

upon Urbino'. I had repeated to myself what I could remember of Ben Jonson's address to the Court of his time, 'Thou art a beautiful and brave spring and waterest all the noble plants of this Island. In thee the whole Kingdom dresseth itself and is ambitious to use thee as her glass. Beware then thou render men's figures truly and teach them no less to hate their deformities, than to love their forms.... Thy servant but not slave, Ben Jonson.'

And now I begin to imagine some equivalent gathering to that about me, called together by the heads of some State where every democratic dream had been fulfilled, and where all men had started level and only merit, acknowledged by all the people, ruled. The majority so gathered, certainly all who had supreme authority, would have reached that age when an English novelist becomes eligible for the Order of Merit. Times of disturbance might indeed carry into power some man of comparative youth, of fifty or sixty years perhaps, but I think of normal times. Here and there one would notice sons and daughters, perhaps even the more dutiful grandsons and grand-daughters, but in the eyes of those, though not in their conversation, an acute observer might discover disquiet and a restless longing for the moment when they could slip away to some night-club's compensating anarchy. In the conversation of old and young there would be much sarcasm, great numbers of those tales which we all tell to one another's disadvantage. For all men would display to others' envy the trophies won in their life of struggle.

Then suddenly my thought runs off to that old Gaelic poem made by the nuns of Iona. A Swedish or Danish ship had been cast upon the rocks, and all royalties on board had perished, but one baby. The nuns mothered the baby, and their cradle-song, famous for generations after, repeated over and over, praising in symbol every great man's child---every tested long-

enduring stock- --'Daughter of a Queen, grand-daughter of a Queen, great-granddaughter of a Queen, great-great-grand-daughter of a Queen'. Nature, always extravagant, scattering much to find a little, has found no means but hereditary honour to sustain the courage of those who stand waiting for the signal, cowed by the honour and authority of those who lie wearily at the goal. Perhaps, indeed, she created the family with no other object, and may even now mock in her secret way our new ideals---the equality of man, equality of rights,---meditating some wholly different end. Certainly her old arrangements, in all pursuits that gain from youth's recurring sway, or from its training in earliest childhood, surpassed what begins to be a world of old men. The politic Tudor kings and the masterful descendants of Gustavus Vasa were as able as the American presidents, and better educated, and the artistic genius of old Japan continually renewed itself through dynasties of painters. The descendants of Kanoka made all that was greatest in the art of their country from the ninth to the eleventh century, and then it but passed to other dynasties, in whom, as Mr. Binyon says, 'the flower of genius was being continually renewed and revived in the course of many generations'. How serene their art, no exasperation, no academic tyranny, its tradition as naturally observed as the laws of a game or dance. Nor has our individualistic age wholly triumphed in Japan even yet, for it is a few years since a famous player published in his programme his genealogy, running back through famous players to some player of the Middle Ages; and one day in the British Museum Print-Room, I saw a Japanese at a great table judging Chinese and Japanese pictures. 'He is one of the greatest living authorities,' I was told, 'the Mikado's hereditary connoisseur, the fourteenth of his family to hold the post.' May it not have been possible that the use of the mask in acting, and the omission from painting of the cast shadow, by making observation and experience of life less important, and imagination

and tradition more, made the arts transmittable and teachable? But my thoughts have carried me far away.

X

Near me stands a man who is moved also by the spectacle of the Court, but to a Jacobin frenzy, Swede, Englishman, American, German, what does it matter, seeing that his frenzy is international. I had spoken to him earlier in the day and found him a friendly, even perhaps a cultivated man, and certainly not the kind of man who is deliberately rude; but now, he imagines that an attempt has been made to impose upon him. He speaks his thoughts aloud, silenced occasionally by the music, but persistent in the intervals. While waiting to enter the throne-room, he had been anxious to demonstrate that he was there by accident, drifting irresponsibly, no way implicated, as it were, and having accomplished this demonstration by singing a little catch, 'I'm here because I'm here', had commented abundantly upon all he saw: 'The smaller the nation, the grander the uniform'. 'Well---they never got those decorations in war', and so on. He was certain that the breastplates of the sentries were made of tin, but added with a meditative voice, as though anxious to be fair, 'The breastplates of the English Horse Guards are also made of tin'.

As we came through the throne-room, I had heard him say, 'One of the royalties smiled, they consider us as ridiculous', and I had commented, entangled in my dream, 'We are ridiculous, we are the learned at whom the little boys laugh in the streets'. And now when, at a pause in the music, the Queen passes down the great hall, pages holding her train, he says in the same loud voice as before, 'Well, a man has not to suffer that indignity', and then upbraids all forms of ceremony, and repeats an incident of his school life to demonstrate his distaste for Bishops.

As I leave the Palace, a man wearing orders stops for a moment to say, ‘I am the Headmaster of a big school, I was the Prince’s tutor, and I am his friend’.

XI

For the next two or three days we visit picture galleries, the gallery of the National Museum, that of Prince Eugene, that of Baron Thiel. At the National Museum pictures have been taken down and lean against the wall, that they may be sent to London for an exhibition of Swedish art. Someone, exaggerating the influence in London of the Nobel Prize winner, asks me to write something to get people to go and see it, and I half promise, but feel that I have not the necessary knowledge. I know something of the French Impressionism that gave their painters their first impulse, but almost nothing of German or Austrian, and I have seen that of Sweden for the first time. At a first glance Impressionism seems everywhere the same, with differences of power but not of sight or mind, and one has to live with it and make many comparisons, I think, to write more than a few sentences. The great myth-makers and mask-makers, the men of aristocratic mind, Blake, Ingres in the Perseus, Puvis de Chavannes, Rossetti before 1870, Watts when least a moralist, Gustave Moreau at all times, Calvert in the woodcuts, the Charles Ricketts of The Danaides, and of the earlier illustrations of The Sphinx, have imitators, but create no universal language. Administrators of tradition, they seem to copy everything, but in reality copy nothing, and not one of them can be mistaken for another, but Impressionism’s gift to the world was precisely that it gave, at a moment when all seemed sunk in convention, a method as adaptable as that box of architectural Renaissance bricks. It has suddenly taught us to see and feel, as everybody that wills can see and feel, all those things that are as wholesome as rain and sunlight, to

take into our hearts with an almost mystical emotion whatsoever happens without forethought or premeditation. It is not, I think, any accident that their art has coincided everywhere with a new sympathy for crowds, for the poor and the unfortunate. Certainly it arrived in these Scandinavian countries just at the moment when an intellectual awaking of the whole people was beginning, for I always read, or am told, that whatever I inquire about began with the ‘eighties, or was the outcome of some movement of that time.

When I try to define what separates Swedish Impressionism from French, I notice that it has a stronger feeling for particular places. Monet will paint a group of trees by a pond in every possible light, changing his canvas every twenty minutes, and only returning to a canvas when the next day’s clock brings up the same light, but then it is precisely the light that interests him, and interests the buyers of those almost scientific studies. Nobody will buy because it is a pond under his window, or that he passed in his boyhood on his way to school. I noticed in some house where I lunched two pictures of the Stockholm river, painted in different lights by Eugene Janson, and in the National Museum yet another with a third effect of light, but much as the light pleased his imagination, one feels that he cared very much for the fact before him, that he was never able to forget for long that he painted a well-loved, familiar scene. I am constantly reminded of my brother, who continually paints from memory the people and houses of the village where he lived as a child; but the people of Rosses will never care about his pictures, and these painters paint for all educated Stockholm. They have found an emotion held in common, and are no longer, like the rest of us, solitary spectators. I get the impression that their work rouses a more general interest than that of other painters, is less confined to small groups of connoisseurs; I notice in the booksellers’ shops that there seems

to be some little paper-covered pamphlet, full of illustrations, for every notable painter of the school, dead or living, and the people I meet ask constantly what I think of this painter or that other, or somebody will say, ‘This is the golden age of painting’. When I myself try to recall what I have seen, I remember most clearly a picture of a white horse on the seashore, with its tints separated by little lines, that give it a general effect of mosaic, and certain portraits by Ernst Josephson, which prove that their painter was entirely preoccupied with the personality of the sitter, light, colour, design, all subordinate to that. An English portrait- painter is sometimes so preoccupied with the light that one feels he would have had equal pleasure in painting a bottle and an apple. But a preference after so brief a visit may be capricious, having some accidental origin.

XII

On Thursday I give my official lecture to the Swedish Royal Academy. I have chosen ‘The Irish Theatre’ for my subject, that I may commend all those workers, obscure or well-known, to whom I owe much of whatever fame in the world I may possess. If I had been a lyric poet only, if I had not become through this Theatre the representative of a public movement, I doubt if the English committees would have placed my name upon that list from which the Swedish Academy selects its prize-winner. They would not have acknowledged a thought so irrelevant, but those dogeared pages, those pressed violets, upon which the fame of a lyric poet depends at the last, might without it have found no strong voice. I have seen so much beautiful lyric poetry pass unnoticed for years, and indeed at this very moment a little book of exquisite verse lies upon my table, by an author who died a few years ago, whom I knew slightly, and whose work I ignored, for chance had shown me only that part of it for which I could not care.

On my way to the lecture hall I ask an Academician what kind of audience I will have, and he replies, ‘An audience of women, a fit audience for a poet’; but there are men as well as women. I had thought it would be difficult to speak to an audience in a language they had learnt at school, but it is exceedingly easy. All I say seems to be understood, and I am conscious of that sympathy which makes a speaker forget all but his own thoughts, and soliloquize aloud. I am speaking without notes and the image of old fellow-workers comes upon me as if they were present, above all of the embittered life and death of one, and of another’s laborious, solitary age, and I say, ‘When your King gave me medal and diploma, two forms should have stood, one at either side of me, an old woman sinking into the infirmity of age and a young man’s ghost. I think when Lady Gregory’s name and John Synge’s name are spoken by future generations, my name, if remembered, will come up in the talk, and that if my name is spoken first their names will come in their turn because of the years we worked together. I think that both had been well pleased to have stood beside me at the great reception at your Palace, for their work and mine has delighted in history and tradition.’ I think as I speak these words of how deep down we have gone, below all that is individual, modern and restless, seeking foundations for an Ireland that can only come into existence in a Europe that is still but a dream.

XIII

On Friday we visit the great Town Hall, which is the greatest work of Swedish art, a master-work of the Romantic movement. The Royal Palace had taken ninety years to build, and been the organizing centre of the art of its time, and this new magnificence, its narrow windows opening out upon a formal garden, its tall tower rising from the quayside, has taken ten years.

It, too, has been an organizing centre, but for an art more imaginative and amazing. Here there is no important French influence, for all that has not come out of the necessities of site and material, no matter in what school the artist studied, carries the mind backward to Byzantium. I think of but two comparable buildings, the Pennsylvania terminus in New York, and the Catholic Cathedral at Westminster, but the Pennsylvania terminus, noble in austerity, is the work of a single mind, elaborating a suggestion from a Roman Bath, a mind that---supported by the American deference to authority---has been permitted to refuse everything not relevant to a single dominating idea. The starting-hours of the trains are upon specially designed boards, of a colour that makes them harmonize with the general design, and all other advertisements are forbidden, even in the stations that the trains pass immediately after leaving or before entering the terminus. The mood of severity must be prolonged or prepared for. The Catholic Cathedral is of a greater magnificence in general design, but being planted in a country where public opinion rules and the subscribers to every fund expect to have their way, is half ruined by ignoble decoration, the most ignoble of all planned and paid for by my countrymen. The Town Hall of Stockholm, upon the other hand, is decorated by many artists, working in harmony with one another and with the design of the building as a whole, and yet all in seeming perfect freedom. In England and Ireland public opinion compels the employment of the worst artists, while here the authority of a Prince and the wisdom of a Socialist Minister of culture, and the approval of the most educated of all nations, have made possible the employment of the best. These myth-makers and mask-makers worked as if they belonged to one family, and the great walls where the roughened surface of the bricks, their carefully varied size and tint, takes away all sense of mechanical finish; the mosaic- covered walls of the ‘Golden

Room'; the paintings hung upon the walls of the committee-rooms; the fresco paintings upon the greater surfaces with their subjects from Swedish mythology; the wrought iron and the furniture, where all suggests history, and yet is full of invention; the statuary in marble and in bronze, now mythological in subject, now representations of great Swedes, modelled naked as if they had come down from some Roman heaven; all that suggestion of novelty and of an immeasurable past; all that multitude and unity, could hardly have been possible, had not love of Stockholm and belief in its future so filled men of different minds, classes, and occupations that they almost attained the supreme miracle, the dream that has haunted all religions, and loved one another. No work comparable in method or achievement has been accomplished since the Italian cities felt the excitement of the Renaissance, for in the midst of our individualistic anarchy, growing always, as it seemed, more violent, have arisen once more subordination, design, a sense of human need.

On Saturday I see at the Royal Theatre a performance of my Cathleen ni Houlihan. The old father and mother are excellent and each performance differs but little from an exceedingly good Abbey performance, except for certain details of scene, and for differences of interpretation, made necessary by the change of audience. Lines spoken by Cathleen ni Houlihan just before she leaves the cottage always move an Irish audience powerfully for historical reasons, and so the actress begins at much the same emotional level as those about her, and then works up to a climax upon these lines. But here they could have no special appeal, so she strikes a note of tragedy at once, and does not try for a strong climax. The management had sent to the West of Ireland for photographs of scenery, and the landscape, seen through the open door, has an appropriateness and grandeur our poverty-stricken Abbey has never attained. Upon the other hand the cottage and

costume of the peasants suggest a richer peasantry than ours. The management has, I think, been misled by that one-hundred- pound dowry, for in Sweden, where the standard of living is high, a farmer would probably have thought it more necessary to feed his family and himself, and to look after his daughter's education, than to save one hundred pounds for her dowry. This affects the acting. The peasants are permitted to wear a light buckle-shoe indoors, whereas they would in reality have gone barefooted, or worn heavy working boots. Almost the first thing a new actor at the Abbey has to learn is to walk as if he wore those heavy boots, and this gives awkwardness and slowness to his movements. I do not point this out as an error in the Swedish production, for a symbolic play like Cathleen should, in most cases, copy whatever environment is most familiar to the audience. It is followed by She Stoops to Conquer, and by comparison our Abbey performance of that play seems too slow. Goldsmith's play is not in Sweden, I should think, the established classic that it is with us, and so a Swedish producer is less reverent. He discovers quickly that there are dull places and unrealities, that it is technically inferior to Moliere, and that we may not discover this also, prefers a rattling pace.

XV

Everybody has told us that we have not seen Stockholm at its best because we have not seen it with the trees all white and the streets deep in snow. When snow has fallen it has melted immediately, and there is central heating everywhere. While we are packing for our journey a young American poet comes to our room, and introduces himself. 'I was in the South of France', he says, 'and I could not get a room warm enough to work in, and if I cannot get a warm room here I will go to Lapland.'

The Irish Dramatic Movement

A LECTURE DELIVERED TO THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SWEDEN YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS

Ladies and gentlemen, I have chosen as my theme the Irish Dramatic Movement, because when I remember the great honour that you have conferred upon me, I cannot forget many known and unknown persons. Perhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised upon the stage, perhaps even---though this could be no portion of their deliberate thought---if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement. I wish to tell the Royal Academy of Sweden of the labours, triumphs and troubles of my fellow-workers.

The modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891. A disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics; an event was conceived; and the race began, as I think, to be troubled by that event's long gestation. Dr. Hyde founded the Gaelic League, which was for many years to substitute for political argument a Gaelic grammar, and for political meetings village gatherings, where songs were sung and stories told in the Gaelic language. Meanwhile I had begun a movement in English, in the language in which modern Ireland thinks and does its business; founded certain societies where clerks, working men, men of all classes, could study the Irish poets, novelists and historians who had written in English, and as much of Gaelic literature as

had been translated into English. But the great mass of our people, accustomed to interminable political speeches, read little, and so from the very start we felt that we must have a theatre of our own. The theatres of Dublin had nothing about them that we could call our own. They were empty buildings hired by the English travelling companies, and we wanted Irish plays and Irish players. When we thought of these plays we thought of everything that was romantic and poetical, because the nationalism we had called up---the nationalism every generation had called up in moments of discouragement---was romantic and poetical. It was not, however, until I met in 1896 Lady Gregory, a member of an old Galway family, who had spent her life between two Galway houses, the house where she was born, the house into which she married, that such a theatre became possible. All about her lived a peasantry who told stories in a form of English which has much of its syntax from Gaelic, much of its vocabulary from Tudor English, but it was very slowly that we discovered in that speech of theirs our most powerful dramatic instrument, not indeed until she herself began to write. Though my plays were written without dialect and in English blank verse, I think she was attracted to our movement because their subject-matter differed but little from the subject- matter of the country stories. Her own house has been protected by her presence, but the house where she was born was burned down by incendiaries some few months ago, and there has been like disorder over the greater part of Ireland. A trumpery dispute about an acre of land can rouse our people to monstrous savagery, and if in their war with the English auxiliary police they were shown no mercy, they showed none: murder answered murder. Yet their ignorance and violence can remember the noblest beauty. I have in Galway a little old tower, and when I climb to the top of it I can see at no great distance a green field where stood once the thatched cottage of a famous country beauty, the

mistress of a small local landed proprietor. I have spoken to old men and women who remembered her, though all are dead now, and they spoke of her as the old men upon the wall of Troy spoke of Helen, nor did man and woman differ in their praise. One old woman of whose youth the neighbours cherished a scandalous tale said of her, ‘I tremble all over when I think of her’; and there was another on the neighbouring mountain who said, ‘The sun and the moon never shone on anybody so handsome, and her skin was so white that it looked blue, and she had two little blushes on her cheeks’. And there were men that told of the crowds that gathered to look at her upon a fair day, and of a man ‘who got his death swimming a river’, that he might look at her. It was a song written by the Gaelic poet Raftery that brought her such great fame, and the cottages still sing it, though there are not so many to sing it as when I was young:---

O star of light and O sun in harvest, O amber hair, O my share of the world,

It is Mary Hynes, the calm and easy woman, Has beauty in her body and in her mind.

It seemed as if the ancient world lay all about us with its freedom of imagination, its delight in good stories, in man’s force and woman’s beauty, and that all we had to do was to make the town think as the country felt; yet we soon discovered that the town would only think town thoughts.

In the country you are alone with your own violence, your own ignorance and heaviness, and with the common tragedy of life, and if you have any artistic capacity you desire beautiful emotion; and, certain that the seasons will be the same always, care not how fantastic its expression. [Note:

I was in my Galway house during the first months of civil war, the railway bridges blown up and the roads blocked with stones and trees. For

the first week there were no newspapers, no reliable news, we did not know who had won nor who had lost, and even after newspapers came, one never knew what was happening on the other side of the hill or of the line of trees. Ford cars passed the house from time to time with coffins standing upon end between the seats, and sometimes at night we heard an explosion, and once by day saw the smoke made by the burning of a great neighbouring house. Men must have lived so through many tumultuous centuries. One felt an overmastering desire not to grow unhappy or embittered, not to lose all sense of the beauty of nature. A stare (our West of Ireland name for a starling) had built in a hole beside my window and I made these verses out of the feeling of the moment:---

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.
We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house is burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

That is only the beginning but it runs on in the same mood. Presently a strange thing happened. I began to smell honey in places where honey could not be, at the end of a stone passage or at some windy turn of the road, and it came always with certain thoughts. When I got back to Dublin I was with

angry people who argued over everything or were eager to know the exact facts: in the midst of the mood that makes realistic drama.

] In the town, where everybody crowds upon you, it is your neighbour not yourself that you hate, and if you are not to embitter his life and your own life, perhaps even if you are not to murder him in some kind of revolutionary frenzy, somebody must teach reality and justice. You will hate that teacher for a while, calling his books and plays ugly, misdirected, morbid, or something of that kind, but you must agree with him in the end. We were to find ourselves in a quarrel with public opinion that compelled us against our own will and the will of our players to become always more realistic, substituting dialect for verse, common speech for dialect.

I had told Lady Gregory that I saw no likelihood of getting money for a theatre and so must put away that hope, and she promised to find the money among her friends. Her neighbour, Mr. Edward Martyn, paid for our first performances; and our first players came from England; but presently we began our real work with a company of Irish amateurs. Somebody had asked me at a lecture, 'Where will you get your actors?' and I had said, 'I will go into some crowded room, put the name of everybody in it on a different piece of paper, put all those pieces of paper into a hat and draw the first twelve'. I have often wondered at that prophecy, for though it was spoken probably to confound and confuse a questioner it was very nearly fulfilled. Our two best men actors were not indeed chosen by chance, for one was a stage-struck solicitors' clerk and the other a working man who had toured Ireland in a theatrical company managed by a Negro. I doubt if he had learned much in it, for its methods were rough and noisy, the Negro whitening his face when he played a white man, but, so strong is stage convention, blackening it when he played a black man. If a player had to open a letter on the stage I have no doubt that he struck it with the flat of his

hand, as I have seen players do in my youth, a gesture that lost its meaning generations ago when blotting-paper was substituted for sand. We got our women, however, from a little political society which described its object as educating the children of the poor, or, according to its enemies, teaching them a catechism that began with this question, ‘What is the origin of evil?’ and the answer, ‘England’. And they came to us for patriotic reasons and acted from precisely the same impulse that had made them teach, and yet two of them proved players of genius, Miss Allgood and Miss Maire O’Neill. They were sisters, one all simplicity, her mind shaped by folksong and folk-story; the other sophisticated, lyrical and subtle. I do not know what their thoughts were as that strange new power awoke within them, but I think they must have suffered from a bad conscience, a feeling that the patriotic impulse had gone, that they had given themselves up to vanity or ambition. Yet I think it was that first misunderstanding of themselves made their peculiar genius possible, for had they come to us with theatrical ambitions they would have imitated some well-known English player and sighed for well-known English plays. Nor would they have found their genius if we had not remained for a long time obscure like the bird within its shell, playing in little halls, generally in some shabby out-of-the-way street. We could experiment and wait, with nothing to fear but political misunderstanding. We had little money and at first needed little, twenty-five pounds given by Lady Gregory and twenty pounds by myself and a few pounds picked up here and there. And our theatrical organization was preposterous, players and authors all sitting together and settling by vote what play should be performed and who should play it. It took a series of disturbances, weeks of argument during which no performance could be given, before Lady Gregory and John Synge and I were put in control. And our relations with the public were even more disturbed. One play was

violently attacked by the patriotic Press because it described a married peasant woman who had a lover, and when we published the old Aran folk-tale upon which it was founded the Press said the tale had reached Aran from some decadent author of pagan Rome. Presently Lady Gregory wrote her first comedy. My verse plays were not long enough to fill an evening and so she wrote a little play on a country love story in the dialect of her neighbourhood. A countryman returns from America with a hundred pounds and discovers his old sweetheart married to a bankrupt farmer. He plays cards with the farmer, and by cheating against himself gives him the hundred pounds. The company refused to perform it because they said to admit an emigrant's return with a hundred pounds would encourage emigration. We produced evidence of returned emigrants with much larger sums, but were told that only made the matter worse. Then after interminable argument had worn us all out Lady Gregory agreed to reduce the sum to twenty, and the actors gave way. That little play was sentimental and conventional, but her next discovered her genius. She too had desired to serve, and that genius must have seemed miraculous to herself. She was in middle life, and had written nothing but a volume of political memoirs and had no interest in the theatre.

Nobody reading to-day her Seven Short Plays can understand why one of them, now an Irish classic, The Rising of the Moon, could not be performed for two years because of political hostility. A policeman discovers an escaped Fenian prisoner and lets him free, because the prisoner has aroused with some old songs the half- forgotten patriotism of his youth. The players would not perform it because they said it was an unpatriotic act to admit that a policeman was capable of patriotism. One well-known leader of the mob wrote to me, 'How can the Dublin mob be expected to fight the police if it looks upon them as capable of patriotism?' When

performed at last the play was received with enthusiasm, but only to get us into new trouble. The chief Unionist Dublin newspaper denounced us for slandering His Majesty's forces, and Dublin Castle denied to us a privilege which we had shared with the other Dublin theatres of buying, for stage purposes, the cast-off clothes of the police. Castle and Press alike knew that the police had frequently let off political prisoners, but 'that only made the matter worse'. Every political party had the same desire to substitute for life, which never does the same thing twice, a bundle of reliable principles and assertions. [Note: Josef Strzygowski in his Origin of Christian Church Art (a translation of a series of lectures delivered in Upsala in 1919) says that art 'flourished less at courts than anywhere else in the world. For at the seat of power everything is subordinated to politics; the forces willing to accept this fact are always welcome; those which are not willing must either emigrate or remain aloof.' The danger to art and literature comes to-day from the tyrannies and persuasions of revolutionary societies and from forms of political and religious propaganda. The persuasion has corrupted much modern English literature, and---during the twenty years that led up to national revolution- --the tyranny wasted the greater part of the energy of Irish dramatists and poets. They had to remain perpetually on the watch to defend their creation, and the more natural the creation the more difficult the defence.] Nor did religious orthodoxy like us any better than political; my Countess Cathleen was denounced by Cardinal Logue as an heretical play, and when I wrote that we would like to perform 'foreign masterpieces' a Nationalist newspaper declared that 'a foreign masterpiece is a very dangerous thing'. The little halls where we performed could hold a couple of hundred people at the utmost and our audience was often not more than twenty or thirty, and we performed but two or three times a month, and during our periods of quarrelling not even that. But there was no lack of

leading articles, we were from the first a recognized public danger. Two events brought us victory: a friend gave us a theatre, and we found a strange man of genius, John Synge. After a particularly angry leading article I had come in front of the curtain and appealed to the hundred people of the audience for their support. When I came down from the stage an old friend, Miss Horniman, from whom I had been expecting a contribution of twenty pounds, said, 'I will find you a theatre' She found and altered for our purpose what is now the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and gave us a small subsidy for a few years. I had met John Synge in Paris in 1896. Somebody had said, 'There is an Irishman living on the top floor of your hotel; I will introduce you'. I was very poor, but he was much poorer. He belonged to a very old Irish family and, though a simple courteous man, remembered it and was haughty and lonely. With just enough to keep him from starvation and not always from half-starvation, he had wandered about Europe, travelling third-class or upon foot, playing his fiddle to poor men on the road or in their cottages. He was the man that we needed, because he was the only man I have ever known incapable of a political thought or of a humanitarian purpose. He could walk the roadside all day with some poor man without any desire to do him good or for any reason except that he liked him. He was to do for Ireland, though more by his influence on other dramatists than by his direct influence, what Robert Burns did for Scotland. When Scotland thought herself gloomy and religious, Providence restored her imaginative spontaneity by raising up Robert Burns to commend drink and the Devil. I did not, however, see what was to come when I advised John Synge to go to a wild island off the Galway coast and study its life because that life 'had never been expressed in literature'. He had learned Gaelic at College and I told him that, as I would have told it to any young man who had learned Gaelic and wanted to write. When he found that wild

island he became happy for the first time, escaping, as he said, ‘from the nullity of the rich and the squalor of the poor’. He had bad health, he could not stand the island hardship long, but he would go to and fro between there and Dublin. Burns himself could not have more shocked a gathering of Scots clergy than did he our players. Some of the women got about him and begged him to write a play about the rebellion of ‘98, and pointed out very truthfully that a play on such a patriotic theme would be a great success. He returned at the end of a fortnight with a scenario upon which he had toiled in his laborious way. Two women take refuge in a cave, a Protestant woman and a Catholic, and carry on an interminable argument about the merits of their respective religions. The Catholic woman denounces Henry VIII. and Queen Elizabeth, and the Protestant woman the Inquisition and the Pope. They argue in low voices, because one is afraid of being ravished by the rebels and the other by the loyal soldiers. But at last either the Protestant or the Catholic says that she prefers any fate to remaining any longer in such wicked company and climbs out. The play was neither written nor performed, and neither then nor at any later time could I discover whether Synge understood the shock that he was giving. He certainly did not foresee in any way the trouble that his greatest play brought on us all. When I had landed from a fishing yawl on the middle of the island of Aran, a few months before my first meeting with Synge, a little group of islanders, who had gathered to watch a stranger’s arrival, brought me to ‘the oldest man upon the island’. He spoke but two sentences, speaking them very slowly: ‘If any gentleman has done a crime we’ll hide him. There was a gentleman that killed his father, and I had him in my house six months till he got away to America.’ It was a play founded on that old man’s story Synge brought back with him. A young man arrives at a little public- house and tells the publican’s daughter that he has murdered his father. He so tells it that he has

all her sympathy, and every time he retells it, with new exaggerations and additions, he wins the sympathy of somebody or other, for it is the countryman's habit to be against the law. The countryman thinks the more terrible the crime, the greater must the provocation have been. The young man himself, under the excitement of his own story, becomes gay, energetic and lucky. He prospers in love, comes in first at the local races, and bankrupts the roulette tables afterwards. Then the father arrives with his head bandaged but very lively, and the people turn upon the impostor. To win back their esteem he takes up a spade to kill his father in earnest, but, horrified at the threat of what had sounded so well in the story, they bind him to hand over to the police. The father releases him and father and son walk off together, the son, still buoyed up by his imagination, announcing that he will be master henceforth. Picturesque, poetical, fantastical, a masterpiece of style and of music, the supreme work of our dialect theatre, his Playboy roused the populace to fury. We played it under police protection, seventy police in the theatre the last night, and five hundred, some newspaper said, keeping order in the streets outside. It is never played before any Irish audience for the first time without something or other being flung at the players. In New York a currant cake and a watch were flung, the owner of the watch claiming it at the stage door afterwards. The Dublin audience has, however, long since accepted the play. It has noticed, I think, that everyone upon the stage is somehow lovable and companionable, and that Synge has described, through an exaggerated symbolism, a reality which he loved precisely because he loved all reality. So far from being, as they had thought, a politician working in the interests of England, he was so little a politician that the world merely amused him and touched his pity. Yet when Synge died in 1909 opinion had hardly changed, we were playing to an almost empty theatre and were continually denounced. Our victory

was won by those who had learned from him courage and sincerity but belonged to a different school. Synge's work, the work of Lady Gregory, my own Cathleen ni Houlihan and my Hour-Glass in its prose form, are characteristic of our first ambition. They bring the imagination and speech of the country, all that poetical tradition descended from the Middle Ages, to the people of the town. Those who learned from Synge had often little knowledge of the country and always little interest in its dialect. Their plays are frequently attacks upon obvious abuses, the bribery at the appointment of a dispensary Doctor, the attempts of some local politician to remain friends with all parties. Indeed the young Ministers and party politicians of the Free State have had, I think, some of their education from our plays. Then, too, there are many comedies which are not political satires though they are concerned with the life of the politics-ridden people of the town. Of these Mr. Lennox Robinson's are the best known; his White-headed Boy has been played in England and America. Of late it has seemed as if this school were coming to an end, for the old plots are repeated with slight variations and the characterization grows mechanical. It is too soon yet to say what will come to us from the melodrama and tragedy of the last four years, but if we can pay our players and keep our theatre open something will come. We are burdened with debt, for we have come through war and civil war and audiences grow thin when there is firing in the streets. We have, however, survived so much that I believe in our luck, and think that I have a right to say my lecture ends in the middle or even, perhaps, at the beginning of the story. But certainly I have said enough to make you understand why, when I received from the hands of your King the great honour your Academy has conferred upon me, I felt that a young man's ghost should have stood upon one side of me and at the other a living woman sinking into the infirmity of age. Indeed I have seen little in this last

week that would not have been memorable and exciting to Synge and to Lady Gregory, for Sweden has achieved more than we have hoped for our own country. I think most of all, perhaps, of that splendid spectacle of your Court, a family beloved and able that has gathered about it not the rank only but the intellect of its country. No like spectacle will in Ireland show its work of discipline and of taste, though it might satisfy a need of the race no institution created under the influence of English or American democracy can satisfy.

THE END

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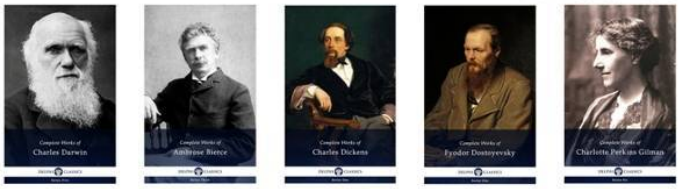

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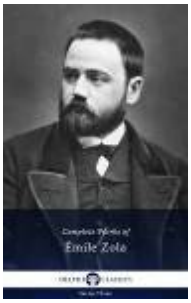

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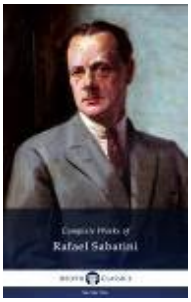

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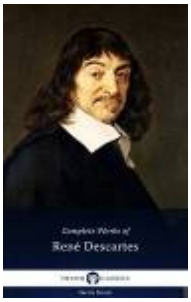

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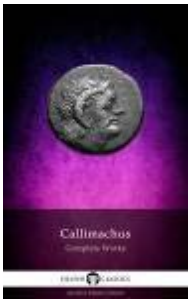

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Delphi Poetry Anthology

Edgar Allan Poe (poetry)

Edmund Spenser

Edward Lear

Edward Thomas

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Emily Dickinson

Epic of Gilgamesh

Ezra Pound

Friedrich Schiller (English)

George Chapman

George Herbert

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gertrude Stein

Hafez

Heinrich Heine

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

Henry Lawson

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Isaac Rosenberg

James Russell Lowell

Johan Ludvig Runeberg

John Clare

John Donne

John Dryden

John Gower

John Keats

John Milton

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

Joseph Addison

Kahlil Gibran

Leigh Hunt

Lord Byron

Ludovico Ariosto

Luís de Camões

Matthew Arnold

Matthew Prior

Michael Drayton

Nikolai Nekrasov

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Petrarch

Rabindranath Tagore

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Robert Browning

Robert Burns

Robert Frost

Robert Southey

Rumi

Rupert Brooke

Sara Teasdale

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Sir Philip Sidney

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Sir Walter Raleigh

Thomas Chatterton

Thomas Gray

Thomas Hardy (poetry)

Thomas Hood

Thomas Moore

Torquato Tasso

T. S. Eliot

W. B. Yeats

Walter Savage Landor

Walt Whitman

Wilfred Owen

William Blake

William Cowper

William Wordsworth

Masters of Art

Albrecht Dürer

Amedeo Modigliani

Artemisia Gentileschi

Berthe Morisot

Camille Pissarro

Canaletto

Caravaggio

Caspar David Friedrich

Claude Lorrain

Claude Monet

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Diego Velázquez

Donatello

Edgar Degas

Édouard Manet

Edvard Munch

El Greco

Eugène Delacroix

Francisco Goya

Giotto

Giovanni Bellini

Gustave Courbet

Gustav Klimt

Hieronymus Bosch

Jacques-Louis David

James Abbott McNeill Whistler

Jan van Eyck

J. M. W. Turner

Johannes Vermeer

John Constable

Leonardo da Vinci

Michelangelo

Paul Cézanne

Paul Gauguin

Paul Klee

Peter Paul Rubens

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Piet Mondrian

Sandro Botticelli

Raphael

Rembrandt van Rijn

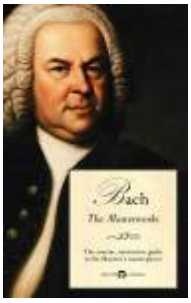
Thomas Gainsborough

Tintoretto

Titian

Vincent van Gogh

Wassily Kandinsky



Great Composers

Antonín Dvořák

Franz Schubert

Johann Sebastian Bach

Joseph Haydn

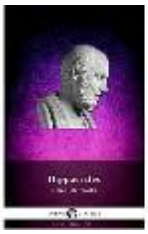
Ludwig van Beethoven

Piotr Illitch Tchaïkovsky

Richard Wagner

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Alphabetical List of Titles



A. E. Housman

Achilles Tatius

Adam Mickiewicz

Adam Smith

Aeschylus

Albrecht Dürer

Aldous Huxley

Alexander Pope

Alexander Pushkin

Alexandre Dumas (English)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Algernon Blackwood

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Ambrose Bierce

Amedeo Modigliani

Ammianus Marcellinus

Anatole France

Andrew Lang

Andrew Marvell

Ann Radcliffe

Anna Katharine Green

Anthony Hope

Anthony Trollope

Anton Chekhov

Antonín Dvořák

Aphra Behn

Apollodorus

Apollonius of Rhodes

Appian

Apuleius

Aristophanes

Aristotle

Arnold Bennett

Arrian

Artemisia Gentileschi

Arthur Machen

Arthur Morrison

Arthur Schopenhauer

Athenaeus

August Strindberg

Augustine

Aulus Gellius

Baroness Emma Orczy

Beatrix Potter

Beaumont and Fletcher

Bede

Ben Jonson

Benjamin Disraeli

Beowulf

Berthe Morisot

Booth Tarkington

Bram Stoker

Bret Harte

C. S. Forester

C. S. Lewis

Callimachus

Camille Pissarro

Canaletto

Captain Frederick Marryat

Captain Mayne Reid

Caravaggio

Caspar David Friedrich

Cassius Dio

Cato

Catullus

Charles and Mary Lamb

Charles Darwin

Charles Dickens

Charles Kingsley

Charles Lever

Charles Reade

Charlotte M. Yonge

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Smith

Christina Rossetti

Christopher Marlowe

Cicero

Claude Lorrain

Claude Monet

Claudian

Clement of Alexandria

Confucius

Cornelius Nepos

D. H Lawrence (poetry)

D.H. Lawrence

Daniel Defoe

Dante Alighieri (English)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

David Hume

Delphi Poetry Anthology

Demosthenes

Dickensiana Volume I

Diego Velázquez

Dio Chrysostom

Diodorus Siculus

Diogenes Laërtius

Dionysius of Halicarnassus

Donatello

E. F. Benson

E. M. Delafield

E. M. Forster

E. Nesbit

E. Phillips Oppenheim

E. W. Hornung

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (poetry)

Edgar Degas

Edgar Rice Burroughs

Edgar Wallace

Edith Wharton

Edmund Burke

Edmund Spenser

Édouard Manet

Edvard Munch

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Edward Gibbon

Edward Lear

Edward Thomas

Edwin Arlington Robinson

El Greco

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth von Arnim

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Ellen Wood

Émile Zola

Emily Dickinson

Ennius

Epic of Gilgamesh

Epictetus

Erasmus

Ernest Bramah

Ernest Hemingway

Eugène Delacroix

Eugene Sue

Euripides

Ezra Pound

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Fergus Hume

Ford Madox Ford

Frances Burney

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Frances Trollope

Francis Bacon

Francisco Goya

Frank Norris

Frank R. Stockton

Franz Schubert

Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Schiller (English)

Frontius

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

G. A. Henty

G. K. Chesterton

Galileo Galilei

Geoffrey Chaucer

George Bernard Shaw

George Chapman

George Eliot

George Gissing

George Herbert

George MacDonald

George Meredith

George Moore

George Orwell

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein

Gilbert and Sullivan

Giotto

Giovanni Bellini

Giovanni Boccaccio

Grant Allen

Gustav Klimt

Gustave Courbet

Gustave Flaubert (English)

Guy Boothby

Guy de Maupassant

H. G. Wells

H. P. Lovecraft

H. Rider Haggard

Hafez

Hall Caine

Hans Christian Andersen

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Heinrich Heine

Henrik Ibsen

Henry David Thoreau

Henry Fielding

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

Henry James

Henry Lawson

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Henryk Sienkiewicz

Herman Melville

Herodotus

Hesiod

Hieronymus Bosch

Hilaire Belloc

Hippocrates

Homer

Honoré de Balzac (English)

Horace

Horace Walpole

Hugh Walpole

Ian Fleming

Immanuel Kant

Isaac Rosenberg

Isocrates

Ivan Turgenev

Izaak Walton

J. M. Barrie

J. M. Synge

J. M. W. Turner

J. W. von Goethe (English)

Jack London

Jacques-Louis David

James Abbott McNeill Whistler

James Fenimore Cooper

James Joyce

James Russell Lowell

Jane Austen

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jerome K. Jerome

Johan Ludvig Runeberg

Johann Sebastian Bach

Johanna Spyri

Johannes Vermeer

John Buchan

John Bunyan

John Clare

John Constable

John Donne

John Dryden

John Galsworthy

John Galt

John Gower

John Keats

John Locke

John Milton

John Muir

John Ruskin

John Webster

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

Jonathan Swift

Joseph Addison

Joseph Addison

Joseph Conrad

Joseph Haydn

Josephus

Jules Verne

Julian

Julius Caesar

Juvenal

Kahlil Gibran

Karl Marx

Kate Chopin

Katherine Mansfield

Kenneth Grahame

L. Frank Baum

L. M. Montgomery

Lafcadio Hearn

Laurence Sterne

Leigh Hunt

Leo Tolstoy

Leonardo da Vinci

Lewis Carroll

Livy

Longus

Lord Byron

Lord Dunsany

Louisa May Alcott

Lucan

Lucian

Lucretius

Ludovico Ariosto

Ludwig van Beethoven

Luís de Camões

Lytton Strachey

M. E. Braddon

M. R. James

Manetho

Marcel Proust (English)

Marcus Aurelius

Margaret Oliphant

Maria Edgeworth

Marie Corelli

Mark Twain

Martial

Mary Shelley

Mary Wollstonecraft

Matthew Arnold

Matthew Prior

Maurice Leblanc

Max Brand

Maxim Gorky

Michael Drayton

Michel de Montaigne

Michelangelo

Miguel de Cervantes

Molière

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Niccolò Machiavelli

Nikolai Gogol

Nikolai Nekrasov

Nonnus

Norse Sagas

O. Henry

Oliver Goldsmith

One Thousand and One Nights

Oscar Wilde

Ouida

Ovid

Paul Cézanne

Paul Gauguin

Paul Klee

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Pausanias

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Peter Paul Rubens

Petrarch

Petronius

Piero della Francesca

Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Piet Mondrian

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Pindar

Piotr Illitch Tchaïkovsky

Plato

Plautus

Pliny the Elder

Pliny the Younger

Plotinus

Plutarch

Polybius

Procopius

Propertius

Quintus Curtius Rufus

Quintus Smyrnaeus

R. Austin Freeman

R. D. Blackmore

R. M. Ballantyne

R. S. Surtees

Rabindranath Tagore

Radclyffe Hall

Rafael Sabatini

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Raphael

Rembrandt van Rijn

René Descartes

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Richard Marsh

Richard Wagner

Robert Browning

Robert Burns

Robert E. Howard

Robert Frost

Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Southey

Robert W. Chambers

Rudyard Kipling

Rumi

Rupert Brooke

Saki

Sallust

Samuel Butler

Samuel Johnson

Samuel Pepys

Samuel Richardson

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Sandro Botticelli

Sappho

Sara Teasdale

Sax Rohmer

Seneca the Younger

Septuagint

Sheridan Le Fanu

Sidonius

Sigmund Freud

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sir Issac Newton

Sir Philip Sidney

Sir Richard Burton

Sir Thomas Malory

Sir Thomas More

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Sir Walter Raleigh

Sir Walter Scott

Sophocles

Stanley J. Weyman

Statius

Stendhal

Stephen Crane

Stephen Leacock

Strabo

Suetonius

T. S. Eliot

Tacitus

Talbot Mundy

Terence

Tertullian

The Brontës

The Brothers Grimm

The Harvard Classics

Theocritus

Theodore Dreiser

Thomas Babington Macaulay

Thomas Carlyle

Thomas Chatterton

Thomas De Quincey

Thomas Gainsborough

Thomas Gray

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy (poetry)

Thomas Hood

Thomas Love Peacock

Thomas Middleton

Thomas Moore

Thomas Paine

Thucydides

Tibullus

Tintoretto

Titian

Tobias Smollett

Torquato Tasso

Varro

Victor Hugo

Vincent van Gogh

Virgil

Virginia Woolf

Voltaire

W. B. Yeats

W. Somerset Maugham

W. W. Jacobs

Walt Whitman

Walter Pater

Walter Savage Landor

Washington Irving

Wassily Kandinsky

Wilfred Owen

Wilkie Collins

William Blake

William Cowper

William Dean Howells

William Harrison Ainsworth

William Hazlitt

William Hope Hodgson

William James

William Makepeace Thackeray

William Morris

William Shakespeare

William Wordsworth

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Xenophon

Zane Grey

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Drumcliff Cemetery, County Dublin — Yeats' final resting place

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death
Horseman pass by
W B YEATS
BOLTON

Yeats' grave